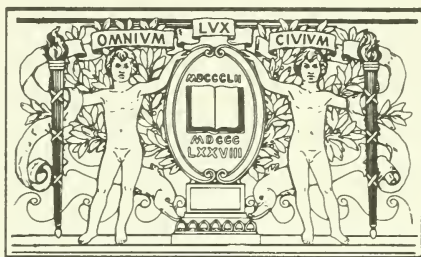


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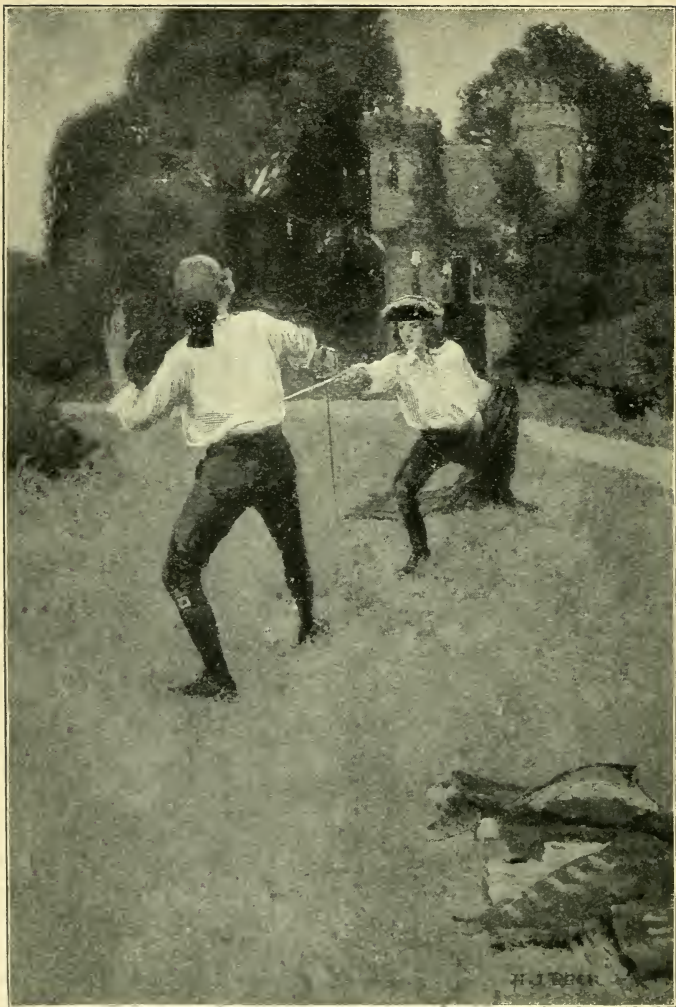
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THE LITTLE CHEVALIER



"EN GARDE, MONSIEUR!" (page 48)

THE LITTLE CHEVALIER

BY

M. E. M. DAVIS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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TO

E. M. H. AND F. L. H.

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THE LITTLE CHEVALIER

I

THE PLACE D'ARMES

DE VALDETERRE paused on the crest of the sodded levee and looked about him with a keen interest — not unmixed with a certain amazed contempt. La Sarabande, the high-breasted ship which he had quitted a moment before, had been made fast to iron-ringed cypress posts by the water-side, and her huge bulk was already rising and falling gently on a light swirl of the river — that storied Mississippi which for a century and more had been calling with a siren's voice across the sea to the young blood of France. With its dull, low-lying shores — parted by a mile of

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yellow water, topped with muddy foam and strewn with a wrack of matted leaves and twigs, upreared tree-roots and half-submerged tree-trunks — the river had been distinctly disappointing, from its mouth upward, to the new-comer; it lacked the anticipated majesty — the mighty rush and roar, the head-long plunge toward the Mexican sea — of La Salle's fabled River of Misfortune. De Valdeterre experienced a growing scorn for this wide expanse of turbid tranquillity, — having as yet no conception of the inexorable monster at this moment quiescent on his reedy bed.

A swarm of light water-craft danced beneath the rounded sides of the *Sarabande*, or darted diagonally back and forth, to and from the Plantations du Roi on the western shore of the river. Some of these were large canoes with up-curved ends; others narrow pirogues born of the sinuous bayou and the track-

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less *cyprière* of the interior wilderness. Though unaware of the delicate skill necessary to the management of the latter, the stranger's face lighted with admiration at the ease and dexterity with which the single occupants of the needle-like barques guided them with a sweep of the long paddle in and out among the clumsy keel-boats and heavy-bottomed barges which moved sluggishly along-shore, or lay moored against the levee. He uttered a pleased exclamation on perceiving that several of the paddlers were Indians, with fierce black locks and tawny skins; oddly picturesque in coarse blankets, beaded belts, and doeskin leggings. He had seen such from time to time in Paris, whither, arrayed in barbaric splendor, they had been fetched to illustrate the glory of John Law's Eldorado, or the futile visions of his successors. There they had had the vague unreality of dreams; here, they seemed

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to give verity to the vanished Eldorado itself. In the gay dark faces and loquacious tongues of the canoe-men he recognized the more familiar type of the Canadian voyageur — a more frequent estray into the cabarets of Paris; and here and there a pair of blue eyes beneath a shock of sunburnt hair proclaimed an American flatboatman adventured hither from the far-off rivers of Kentucky, or the twisting streams of Tennessee. The '*Méricain* reddened menacingly under the stranger's polite stare; the Canadian filliped a familiar forefinger in his direction and laughed in his face. "Ohé, m'sieu le Bateleur," called a slim youngster standing, legs apart, in easy poise on the swaying bow of his cockle-shell. "Ohé ! Faites danser votre marionette là, s'il vous plait !"

Chapron, the old servant, — somewhat wooden indeed in appearance, stiff and erect in his long-bodied black coat and

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neat small-clothes, carrying his master's portmanteau and cloak, — scowled angrily ; but de Valdeterre answered the pleasantry in kind and turned to continue his survey.

The levee, scarce ten years old, following the curves of the river, stretched out in either direction as far as the eye could reach ; the sloping sides were overlaid with a thick growth of tough grass — at this moment lightly scorched by the mild breath of a semi-tropical midwinter ; the broad level top, worn smooth by trampling feet, was outlined by a double row of cottonwood trees whose leafless branches were silhouetted against a bright blue sky. On the landward side a sweep of low marshy ground separated the plantations of young willows, which fringed the base of the embankment, from the Place d'Armes, or Military Square of the capital of the Province.

It was the year of our Lord 1752 ;

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the Mississippi Bubble had long ago burst — long ago, that is, as the years of the young colony were measured ; the Scotchman's soaring scheme had collapsed, leaving but shreds of its wild imaginings hanging in the sky above France for dreamers to clutch at, or for unscrupulous speculators to weave into fresh webs for the unwary.

The young Vicomte de Valdeterre, setting his face westward, had followed no dissolving mirage. The impulse which led him to the province of Louisiana had its roots in far other soil than those "shores, whose very sands are gold," — sung a score or more years earlier by the delirious court-poets of the Regency. But his dreams had been unconsciously tinged by the universal *couleur de rose* through which Young France, despite warning and experience, continued to regard the Land Beyond the Sea. He had conjured up, during the long, wearisome voyage across

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the Atlantic in the cumbersome Sarabande, a fantasy of definite shape, goodly to the inner eye, — the conceit of a fair city where the Marquis de Vaudreuil held his miniature court. He had pictured to himself the busy quays faced with great warehouses, looking out upon the dashing sea-blue current of the Mississippi ; the stately mansions beyond ; the arched bridges spanning those aqueducts described in the illuminated leaflets displayed in the book stalls around the Palais de Justice or on the Pont Neuf ; the processions of slaves like those in the *Thousand and One Nights*, bearing all manner of strange and rich merchandise through wide boulevards into busy exchanges ; the curiously clad envoys from Mexican or Indian courts bartering, in the antechambers of the Palace, ingots of gold and silver for Parisian stuffs.

He smiled after these vanishing chimeras as he picked his way across the

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marshy level, followed by Chapron ; and passing the outlying stalls where itinerant peddlers dispensed their wares to motley crowds of sailors, Indians, ex-galley slaves, Canadian *coureurs de bois*, American traders, idlers of every description, he entered the inclosed quadrangle known as the Place d'Armes.

The square, surrounded by a cypress picket fence, — broken on each side by a wide wooden gate, — was crossed and re-crossed at right angles by dusty footways ; a few cottonwood saplings were set in prim array along the main walks ; their trunks showed white and naked against the glistening green of a clump of young orange-trees massed in the centre. On its upper side this heart of the young town was faced by a small brick church ; de Valdeterre piously removed his hat as his eyes fell upon the cross surmounting the wooden spire ; to the left of the church, half hidden in embowering shrubs and

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vines, stood a galleried and jalousied building, resembling with its pillared wings some small château at Auteuil or Chantilly. An almost princely sweep of garden and orchard was visible in the rear of the house over a low brick wall ; some monks in black gowns were busy among the garden beds. On the right of the church arose a compact brick edifice which de Valdeterre rightly judged to be a guard-house or prison. Rows of squat shops and open booths, interspersed with more pretentious two-storied houses, half brick, half cypress, flanked the square north and south.

The Place was picturesquely thronged ; men passed and repassed, hurrying about their business, or were gathered in groups discussing the news just brought in from the West Indies by the *Sarabande* ; some stood apart turning the thin, fluttering pages of letters, six months old, from France ; there were workmen in conven-

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tional cap and blouse ; negresses from the Halles, or market near by, stepping lightly homeward, baskets poised on turbaned heads, hands on ample hips ; priests in the garb of the Capuchin order ; officers in the king's uniform ; and a goodly sprinkling of the more substantial citizens of the town. These last, the stranger noted, were attired with almost foppish elegance, but for the most part in a costume familiar to Paris a couple of years earlier. As he made his way through the shifting crowd, more than one of his late fellow passengers called or beckoned to him, but waving a courteous hand he hurried on. Three or four young women, attended by negro handmaids, grave, elderly, watchful, came out of the church at the moment he approached the upper gateway ; they regarded the handsome, pale-faced young man in his sombre mourning garb furtively but approvingly. He passed on unconscious of

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their scrutiny, looking uncertainly about him as if in search of some special object or place.

On the upper corner of Rue Chartres, after a glance at the swinging sign above the door, he turned into *Le Veau qui Tête*, the famous café of Monsieur Jean Marie Raguet. A number of small tables were scattered over the sanded floor of the public-room; at one of these, two men in light coats and flowered waistcoats, wide hats, tasseled belts, and dangling small-swords, were seated with bottle and glasses before them. The proprietor of The Sucking Calf, a lean, swarthy, ear-ringed Gascon, leaned idly over his wooden bar. De Valdeterre consulted the slip of paper in his hand. "Monsieur Jean Marie" — he began politely.

The vacant face of the innkeeper instantly reassumed its wonted look of intelligent attention; he straightened

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himself and rubbed his leathery palms together: "Raguet, Jean Marie Raguet. Yes, m'sieu. At the service of m'sieu." He pushed a decanter across the unpainted bar, and reached to a shelf behind him for a glass. "Or," with a more critical glance at his guest, he hastened to add, "perhaps m'sieu would prefer" — he indicated a table by the vine-draped window.

But no. It appeared that monsieur was not at the present moment in need of refreshment. He was seeking lodgings; Captain Marchand of the good ship *Sarabande*, well known doubtless to Monsieur Jean Marie —

"Raguet," interrupted the innkeeper with a suave bow. "Jean Marie Raguet. At the service of m'sieu."

— Had recommended the well-kept *chambres garnies* of Madame Raguet; also the cuisine of Madame —

The proprietor of The Sucking Calf

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became radiant. He assured monsieur volubly with much outspreading of arms and many tappings of a bony forefinger on the bar that the *apartement* of Jacqueline Raguet, situated in the rear of the inner court, and approached at need by an alley from Rue St. Pierre, was of an elegance hardly to be described ; and as for that cuisine of Jacqueline Raguet, who had fetched the art from Paris, ciel ! how it was magnificent ! If m'sieu would but attend a moment — Jean Marie disappeared abruptly, leaving the café in sole possession of monsieur, his valet, and the two aristocrats at their table.

De Valdeterre glanced carelessly at the latter ; one of them was a man of his own age, thirty or thereabout, frank-faced, open-browed, and attractive ; the other, much older, had, it seemed to the keen eye of the observer, one of those broad fair faces which seem at a distance to present an appearance of engaging

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amiability ; but which on nearer inspection reveal sinister and forbidding lines : he had lifted his glass and appeared to be offering a toast, though only the words “Le Petit Chevalier” reached the listener’s ears ; they were accompanied by a smile which affected de Valdeterre unpleasantly, though he could not have told why. He turned hastily to meet Jean Marie, who had entered, followed by Mère Jacqueline, that famous Mère Jacqueline, who, fat as her husband was lean, and taciturn as he was garrulous, was for half a century the patron saint of the gourmands of this Little Versailles by the Mississippi.

“Will m’sieu be pleased to ascend to his suite?” suggested Raguet obsequiously.

De Valdeterre paused on the threshold. “Have the goodness, Monsieur Raguet, to direct my servant presently to the residence of the Chevalier de la Roche.”

THE PLACE D'ARMES

"But certainly, m'sieu," cried Jean Marie, delighted, "the Château de la Roche! 'T is a step only — by way of the Porte St. Jean. But the Chevalier de la Roche" —

"Very well." The vicomte had turned impatiently on his heel.

The older of the two remaining guests stared after his retreating form. "What the devil," he growled, "does this impertinent macaroni want at the Château de la Roche!"

"Ma foi, Delaup," laughed his companion, "you scent a hawk in the faintest shadow of a wing! Yonder is as pale and spiritless a moth, meseems, as ever fluttered into the garden of the Little Chevalier. *Macaroni!* A death-head, rather! He looks fitter for the ministrations of Sœur St. Stanislaus at the hospital than for" —

"Hold your confounded tongue, Gailiard," interrupted the other irritably.

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“It ding-dongs worse than the bell-clapper of Jean Marie himself. Hey, Raguet,” he added, “how long must a gentleman wait for his reckoning in your pest-hole of a wineshop !”

II

A CHALLENGE

DE VALDETERRE followed Madame Raguet across the large courtyard in the rear of the café and up a flight of stairs, into the *apartement* so highly recommended by the captain of the Sarabande. He found it in truth quite as good as he expected, airy and well lighted, though somewhat bare—the bed in a curtained alcove, a table, a chair, a washstand, and a chest of drawers constituting the only furniture of the single room. He took small note of these or of Mère Jacqueline's brief explanations and unostentatious exit. He sank into the wooden chair and closed his eyes while Chapron silently and skillfully unpacked his portmanteau and placed

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upon the table before him a small portfolio and writing materials. He was feeling suddenly faint and exhausted; the tropical fever which had attacked him while the Sarabande made her long wait for repairs at San Domingo had left him but a residue of the strength which until then he had unconsciously enjoyed. For a moment he felt a strong temptation to throw himself upon the bed and yield to the sense of helplessness against which for weeks he had successfully struggled. But as he languidly opened his eyes they rested upon the portfolio. A thrill of returning life shot through his veins. He sat up, instantly alert and eager. "You may go and make arrangements for your own sleeping cabinet," he said to his servant. "I will ring" — he looked around vaguely for a bell rope — "I will need you within the hour," he concluded. "Be within call."

"The breakfast of Monsieur Henri" —

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suggested Chapron, lingering respectfully by the table. "It is already long past noon and monsieur has eaten nothing since yesterday."

"I shall not breakfast," interrupted his master curtly. "Go. Later, perhaps, a cup of wine and a biscuit. See that you breakfast yourself, however," he added kindly.

"Thanks, Monsieur le Vicomte." Chapron retired, closing the door behind him. De Valdeterre drew toward him a sheet of paper and dipped a pen into the traveling inkstand. With his left hand he smoothed out some folded papers he had extracted from the portfolio. He wrote a single line at the top of the sheet.

"To Monsieur le Chevalier de la Roche."

Then he leaned back, dizzy with the realization that the moment so long awaited had at length arrived.

He reviewed that gray dawn in the January of 1734, he being himself then

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a lad of ten years, when his father, the Vicomte Henri Nadan de Valdeterre, was brought home from a neighboring close gasping for breath, with the life-blood gushing from a ghastly wound in his breast. The commotion in the great de Valdeterre hotel in the Faubourg St. Germaine was as present to the son's bodily senses at this moment as if it had been yesterday—the frantic, aimless runnings hither and thither of the terrified servants; the hurried consultation of the *chirurgien* over the dying man, stretched out on the floor of the grand salon, where, the night before, a throng of brilliantly attired men and women had gathered, mingling the light echoes of their voices with the sobbing tones of the violins in the dancing-hall beyond; his own white and scared face as he saw it reflected in one of the festooned mirrors; above all, the sudden ghostlike apparition of his mother in her trailing night-robe with a

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gay dressing-gown drawn hastily over her shoulders and her small bare feet thrust into her ball slippers. Her single piercing shriek still rang in his ears; he quivered again from head to foot, seeing her as in a vision fall like a broken flower across the dead man's breast.

The scene had never lost its poignancy; but it had never seemed so real as here in this New World whither his father's slayer had fled from a just vengeance, and where he had remained, banished by a *lettre de cachet* of the king, these eighteen years.

Nadan de Valdeterre had lived only long enough to exonerate Valcour de la Roche, his antagonist; they had met, he declared with his dying breath, with equal swords, and on prearranged terms agreeable to both. His son, the young Vicomte Henri, despite this declaration, had grown to manhood with the cherished intention of one day seeking the

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Chevalier de la Roche and demanding revenge for his father's death. His mother, clinging to him with all the fervor of an affection which has no other object, had opposed this purpose with feverish vehemence. A trivial quarrel under his own roof—as had later transpired—with his bosom friend—and the best swordsman in France—had cost her husband his life, and left her widowed and forlorn. She shuddered at the mere thought of her only child baring his breast to the same relentless blade.

“Leave vengeance to God, my son,” she commanded. “Besides, Valcour de la Roche is disgraced and exiled, and his estates confiscated. Who knows what wretchedness and misfortune may not have pursued him and his children into that distant country.”

“He had children, then?” demanded Henri curiously.

“Yes,” replied Madame de Valdeterre ;

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“there were two children, motherless, alas! a boy and a girl. It was even the wish of your father and Valcour” —

She checked herself abruptly, the tears gathering in her beautiful sunken eyes. “Thou wilt not even think again of so mad a scheme, Henri. Oh, my son, promise me, promise me!”

He soothed her tenderly, this lovely young mother with the prematurely gray hair, but forbore to promise. This conversation had taken place when he was about fifteen years old. He had never afterward during his mother's lifetime referred to the determination which remained inexorable, though secret, in his breast. But now, that gentle soul had escaped from the frail body. His mother was dead, and he was free! He was treading at last the same soil which for nearly a score of years had been pressed by the feet of Valcour de la Roche! And this was not all; he caressed the folded

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document under his left hand and smiled grimly. It bore the royal seal of France, and the formally worded page within witnessed the fact that all properties acquired in the province of Louisiana — namely, plantations, houses, mines, jewels, or moneys — by the banished Valcour Méry, Chevalier de la Roche, were confiscate to the bearer of the said state paper, to wit, Henri Louis Nadan, Vicomte de Valdeterre; and thereto His Majesty Louis XV. of France had set his royal hand, at Versailles on the 1st day of August, 1751.

The vicomte resumed his pen with nervous haste. The note was speedily written; he had composed it, pacing the deck of the *Sarabande*, under the silent midnight skies of the tropics; he had learned it by heart, tossing half delirious on his sick bed at San Domingo; he had repeated it to himself a thousand times during the succeeding voyage across the

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storm-swept Mexican sea. There was not a superfluous word in its curt sentences.

When I have informed Monsieur le Chevalier de la Roche [he wrote] that I am but this moment landed on these shores, and that I am the son of that Vicomte de Valdeterre who fell wounded unto death in a duel in the *Clos de Vignes* on the 5th of January, 1734, he will understand why I am addressing him this note. I am fortunate in the date of my arrival, as he will also understand. It is my ardent desire to cross swords with Monsieur de la Roche on this day, if possible. And, as the encounter of the 5th of January, 1734, had no witnesses, if it meets with the approval of monsieur, the encounter of the 5th of January, 1752, shall also be without witnesses. Will it please the Chevalier de la Roche, since I am a stranger in these parts, to

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designate a time and a place where I may repay with interest the obligation which the House of Valdeterre owes to that of la Roche?

(Signed)

HENRI LOUIS NADAN DE VALDETERRE.

The writer sanded, folded, and sealed the note with his father's signet, and summoned his servant.

Chapron, having made friendly acquaintance with Jean Marie, was gossiping over a bottle of claret with that worthy at a table set in the sunfilled courtyard, under the leafless branches of an enormous grapevine which clambered up the rear wall of the wineshop and swung itself clear across the court to the galleried *chambres garnies* of Mère Jacqueline. He arose with a sigh and a reticent shake of the head at his master's call; he listened gravely while the young man charged him to conduct his errand

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with his accustomed secrecy and discretion; and having placed the letter in an inner pocket, he obtained the promised directions from Monsieur Raguet, and set out on his errand.

The vicomte, from whom all weariness had vanished as if by a miracle, wrote two other letters to be delivered in the case of his death: one to his kinsman, the Marquis de Vaudreuil, governor of the province of Louisiana, explaining the mission upon which he had come, and discharging his opponent from any suspicion of indirect dealing; the other to his executors in Paris. Then he began what seemed to him an interminable time of waiting, striding back and forth with impatient steps in the hushed room.

“One would suppose that the Chevalier de la Roche had forgotten how to write!” he muttered at length, “or that he is in no haste to settle his account with the House of Valdeterre.” But he

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smiled at his own words as they passed his lips.

For there had not been wanting during these eighteen years — as he had been told by those who had his own welfare at heart, or were wearying the king for de la Roche's pardon and recall — there had not lacked news of the chevalier's bravery in the Indian wars of the colony, his valiant leadership and reckless daring, his haughty and insolent bearing toward certain of his co-colonists in the province. Latterly, the chronicles had been silent concerning him. What if he had fallen ill? What if — Great drops of perspiration started on the young man's forehead at the thought of being balked, even by death, of his long-anticipated and eagerly awaited revenge. But at that moment the door opened and Chapron entered. He took a letter from his bosom and handed it to his master. De Valdeterre broke the seal with hands that trembled.

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“To the Vicomte de Valdeterre.”

The handwriting, though small and somewhat formal and old-fashioned, was bold and firm. Evidently the hand that had traced these lines was unaffected by age or exile ; the Chevalier de la Roche, the reader reflected swiftly, must be hard upon forty-five.

Monsieur le Vicomte de Valdeterre [the note ran] is welcome to the shores of Louisiana, where, indeed, he has been expected these several years. His desire to settle accounts with the House of la Roche reflects credit upon his birth and the traditions of the illustrious family to which he belongs.

It will give the writer pleasure to add to the obligations which the vicomte is under to la Roche. At three and a half o'clock this afternoon, if monsieur will hold himself in readiness, he will be conducted to the place of rendezvous. The

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wishes of the Vicomte de Valdeterre shall be respected in every particular.

(Signed)

VALCOUR DE LA ROCHE.

De Valdeterre consulted his watch eagerly ; it wanted less than an hour to the appointed time. He spent this in refreshing his toilet and in giving a few brief but explicit instructions to his servant, who, accustomed to the vagaries of the youth of the time, listened intelligently and imperturbably, though a wistful expression dawned into his eyes as he buckled his master's sword-belt and handed him his leather gauntlets.

Precisely at half-past three a light tap sounded on the door ; Chapron opened the door and stood aside.

In spite of his preoccupation the vicomte hardly repressed an exclamation. The expected messenger was a negro, coal-black and of gigantic proportions ;

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his superb modeling and erect carriage, joined to an almost imperious bearing, gave him an air of singular dignity in spite of the thick lips, flat nose, and crisp hair which accentuated his race. He wore a sort of livery composed of dark blue cloth with violet facings; de Valdeterre recalled these with a fleeting pang as the colors of the House of la Roche.

“From the Chevalier de la Roche?” he demanded, advancing a step.

“Oui, miché.” The negro made a deep obeisance and added a few words in a patois compounded of French and his native African tongue. This patois, though uncouth in construction, was soft syllabled and caressing in sound. De Valdeterre, who had heard it on the quays and about the market-places in San Domingo, understood it sufficiently to be aware that the man was offering to conduct him to the rendezvous; he threw his short cloak over his shoulders, drew his slouched hat

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over his brows, and addressing a last word to Chapron, he waved his guide forward.

“Oui, miché ;” the negro made another obeisance. “M’appé Achille,” he volunteered with a sudden winning smile which lighted his sombre face and gave to the vicomte’s old domestic a sense of security.

Achille led the way down the stair and across the courtyard, skirting the rear of the café, through whose open door Jean Marie was visible, leaning over his bar and tapping the wood with a restless forefinger while he discussed the affairs of the colony with a pair of leathery compatriots. The narrow alleyway between two unbroken brick walls led into Rue St. Pierre.

The unpaved street was almost deserted, but Rue Royale, into which de Valdeterre presently turned, sauntering with a careless air a few paces behind his guide, presented an animated scene. This was the principal thoroughfare of

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the town ; it was compact with houses, for the most part small and insignificant, though there were a few buildings — almost stately — which gave promise of some far-off future fulfillment of Parisian dreams. At this, the hour most in vogue for the fashionable promenade, — the chief amusement of the miniature court of the Marquis de Vaudreuil, — the narrow and uneven banquettes swarmed with fine ladies and courtly gentlemen, the former in hooped petticoats and paniers, the latter in long cloaks, periwigs, and feathered hats ; all, as de Valdeterre remarked again with an inward smile, a year or two at least behind the constantly changing modes of the greater Versailles. There was a nonchalant swagger about the men, as if the freedom of the New World had loosened some unseen gyves ; and an indolent grace about the women — a soft and easy languor in their movements — which fascinated the

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newcomer as it continues in their descendants to fascinate the stranger after the lapse of a century and a half. He caught himself turning more than once to gaze after a group of these, vanishing into the dim recesses of a *magasin des atours*, or descending a latticed corridor. A plentiful admixture in the promenaders of officers in the uniform of the king's army reminded him sharply of the business in hand, and he pressed upon the negro's heels. There were but few vehicles to be seen ; those which jolted past were heavy and lumbering, fitting the muddy, unpaved street ; but near the corner of Rue d'Orléans, in the rear of the Church St. Louis, he stopped — one of a jostling crowd which pressed respectfully forward to see his excellency the governor of Louisiana drive slowly by in his state coach, drawn by four gayly caparisoned horses, on his way to the Palace. The marquis, a handsome and attractive

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young man, removed his hat, bowing and smiling as he passed ; the equally handsome but haughty dame seated beside him vouchsafed neither smile nor bow to the rabble.

“ My cousin the marquise, methinks,” murmured de Valdeterre, picking his way on, “ is in a dream of royalty, like unto the Barber’s Fifth Brother ! Let us trust that she may not with that pretty foot of hers kick over and smash both her dream and her basket of crockery ! Hullo ! ”

He stooped to pick up the small mite of humanity over which he had unwittingly stumbled, and to soothe the gamin’s tears by the purchase of a king-cake which hung, temptingly crusty, in a baker’s window at his elbow. Why, of course ! The morrow would be the Epiphany ! He caught himself up and hastened after Achille, who had been well-nigh swallowed up in the crowd. Tomorrow would be the Epiphany ! And

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this day, the 5th of January, was the anniversary of that tragedy he had crossed the seas to avenge! For a moment his thoughts were unaccountably confused; he seemed to have to force himself to remember. But his brain cleared; his heart gave a sudden savage leap; he had almost broken into a run. He checked himself and followed his conductor, who had turned into Rue du Maine, and looking back over his shoulder from time to time, was striding along the uneven footway between the muddy street and one of those open ditches which surrounded each of the squares or "islets" composing the town as laid out by the royal engineer, Blond de la Tour. The scattered houses along the street were mostly hidden by high fences made of hewn cypress stakes.

A few moments' walk brought the two men to the rampart—a high embankment of earth crowned by a stockade of rough logs—which formed the outer or

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swamp barrier of New Orleans. Two small pentagonal forts, Fort St. Jean and Fort St. Ferdinand, connected by a covered way, protected this part of the city wall. De Valdeterre eyed these Lilliputian defenses with curiosity as he mounted the rampart, and passed through the Porte St. Jean, and over the lowered drawbridge spanning the broad moat, to the open road beyond.

He barely glanced at the great sweep of *cyprière* which stretched away, sombre and silent, toward Lake Ponchartrain, for the negro, quitting that pretense of a highway known as the Bayou Road, had entered a grove of live-oaks on the right. On the farther side of a small *coulée* or prairie beyond, he stopped before a gate set in a palisaded wall. The batten gate valves were painted a light green ; tossing masses of foliage, of a darker green, showed on either side above the huge gate-posts.

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Achille took a clumsy-looking key from the pouch which hung from his girdle and applied it to the lock ; the ponderous gates swung inward ; he motioned his companion to enter, and stepping in after him, he closed and relocked the gate.

“Monsieur will please follow this path,” he said courteously, in his musical patois. He indicated a footway leading off to the left, and himself hastened away in the opposite direction.

III

LE PETIT CHEVALIER

THE inclosure in which the stranger found himself was a large one, comprising, as far as he could judge, some twenty or thirty acres of ground. A ditch filled with stagnant water followed the line of the encircling wall, its banks covered with a picturesque tangle of vines and weeds — green despite the season. A noble plantation of forest trees — oak, pecan, magnolia, ash, and cypress — bore away to northward from where he stood; through their trunks and downward drooping branches he could see in the distance the château — a dormer - windowed, high - roofed house built of red brick, with many out-buildings in the rear, — a green-hedged

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potager, and a sweep of orchards and orange groves.

The path along which he turned, after a brief survey of this semi-royal demesne erected in a wilderness, pursued the course of the palisade for several rods, then bent at right angles toward a secluded garden or plaisance.

This spot as he approached it gave him an odd sense of familiarity, so exactly had a bit of Old France been reproduced in this remote corner of New France. A natural avenue of superb live-oaks, whose gigantic, wide-stretched limbs might have sheltered a regiment of gendarmes, led to the entrance gate, a low wicket of wrought iron ; beyond this the intersecting alleyways were bordered and overhung by pomegranate, sweet olive, and crêpe myrtle trees ; the inclosed squares were set with cedar and pittosporum cut in fantastic shapes, after the manner of Le Nôtre, — here a lion couchant, there a

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griffin with outspread wings, at one turn a columned arch, at another a flying pennant. A life-sized marble statue of Diana gleamed whitely in one rose-hung recess ; a large circular pool in the centre of the main walk caught upon its motionless surface the red rays of the lowering sun, and shone like a great mirror of burnished copper. On a sun-dial in a parterre near by, a book — a *Livre d'Heures* — was lying open and face downward.

Absolute silence reigned in and around this replica of a Louis Quatorze garden. De Valdeterre walked the shelled paths like one in a dream, his agitated soul gradually hushed into profound peace, the object of his coming hither dissolving softly into oblivion. He drew a long breath, inhaling, with the delight of a man who has been mewed up for the half of a year in an ocean-going ship, the elusive perfume of unseen flowers, and bared his

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forehead to the wind, which had in it a dewy hint of advancing twilight.

But as he passed into the open space beyond this tranquil paradise, purpose came back to him with an electrifying shock. For from the doorway of a small pavilion turreted like a toy castle, directly in front of him, a man had stepped and was coming rapidly toward him. The blood surged into his pale cheeks, his heart beat violently. He stopped, rooted to the ground, like one suddenly turned to stone.

“Monsieur le Vicomte de Valdeterre?” The voice was low, vibrant, and harmonious; it seemed to clear the mist from de Valdeterre’s eyes and restore motion to his limbs. He doffed his hat, made a single step forward, and greeted with a low bow the enemy he had come so far to seek. Then he lifted his head to fix his eyes with a deliberate gaze on the face so deeply graven on his memory—the

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broad forehead, the heavy black eyebrows meeting above the long patrician nose, the square jaw and compressed lips, with their unsuspected tendency to part into gayety or tenderness. What met his gaze instead of this unforgotten face — which should by now be old and seamed — filled him with amazement. He saw the bright, mocking countenance of a lad in his teens ; a pair of violet eyes surveyed him half quizzically from underneath brown up-curved lashes of extraordinary length and silkiness ; a mass of reddish brown hair descended in waves over a pair of youthful shoulders ; the rounded cheeks were fair almost to girlishness ; the red smiling lips were redeemed from effeminacy only by the firm chin. The determined poise of the head offset its tender grace. A long gray cloak hanging from one shoulder, with an end caught up over the right arm, enveloped the slight figure, but allowed a glimpse of the flowered

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coat and waistcoat and the lace ruffles of the "elegant" of the period. A plumed hat and a pair of riding-boots of fine soft leather gave further jauntiness to the lad's costume.

De Valdeterre fell back a pace or two, gasping with astonishment, which changed rapidly to indignation at having thus been juggled with.

"What does this mean?" he demanded sternly, finding his voice. "Where is the Chevalier de la Roche?"

"Softly, monsieur," interrupted the boy with something like a saucy smile. "Here is no riddle, I assure you. You see before you the only and legitimate Chevalier de la Roche" —

De Valdeterre made a movement of impatience.

— "Sometimes known as le Petit Chevalier," continued the speaker imperturbably. "My father, le Grand Chevalier, who had the honor in 1734 of meeting

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the gallant Vicomte de Valdeterre in honorable combat, met with a glorious death one year ago" —

The listener uttered an ejaculation of scornful incredulity.

The boy's face lost its smiling nonchalance. "The Chevalier de la Roche," he repeated with haughty insistence, laying his hand on the hilt of his sword, "perished in a fight with the Natchez Indians one year ago, after having alone and unaided killed the Great Sun and four of his chiefs. If this news has not reached Monsieur the Vicomte de Valdeterre in his secure hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain, it is because the exile's friends, and even his family, remained uncertain of his fate for more than the half of a year. Besides," he added bitterly, "the death of one prisoner more or less in the Bastille or in the wilds of Louisiana is of too small moment to disturb the air of Versailles! How should a matter so in-

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significant as the snuffing out of a de la Roche reach the ears of the king of France — or his favorites ? ”

“ I beg your pardon,” said de Valdeterre gently. “ I could not have known. I left France seven months ago. I — I am sorry.”

The Little Chevalier frowned and threw up a hand as if to ward off sympathy. “ Monsieur le Vicomte de Valdeterre,” he said after a slight pause, speaking in his former careless tone, “ I presume, is prepared ? The light of the 5th of January is fading. Will monsieur have the goodness to draw ? ”

De Valdeterre started. “ I came hither,” he cried with a quick return of anger, “ to fight with the Chevalier Valcour de la Roche ” —

“ At the service of monsieur. I am the Chevalier Valcour de la Roche,” interjected the Little Chevalier, saluting with the point of his sword.

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—“With Valcour de la Roche,” continued the vicomte steadily, “the slayer of my father, the celebrated duelist with the wrist of steel, the hand of iron. I did not cross the Atlantic to fight with a boy.”

“I am not a boy!” the younger man burst out passionately. “And as to the hand of iron and the wrist of steel, monsieur will find to his cost that I have inherited both from the Great Chevalier. *En garde, monsieur!*” As he spoke he wrapped a fold of his cloak around his forearm and placed himself in position.

De Valdeterre continued to gaze at him, baffled and disgusted.

“Perhaps,” declared the Little Chevalier tauntingly, “perhaps Monsieur de Valdeterre, having waited already eighteen years to discharge the debt of which he wrote so bravely an hour or two ago, would prefer to wait still longer. In that case” —

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"The devil!" snorted the vicomte, infuriated yet more by the lad's tones than by his words. He ripped out his sword. "Must I wing the boy?" he muttered savagely between his teeth; "but what can a man do? I am ready, monsieur," he added politely aloud. "And if" —

"And if" — the lad caught up the word gayly, his good humor quite restored. "And if the Chevalier de la Roche be banished to yet more distant wildernesses by His Majesty Louis of France, it will not, at least, be by the fault of the Vicomte de Valdeterre!"

De Valdeterre laughed in spite of himself. "Perhaps" — he suggested significantly, assuming his pose.

Again the quick response to an unspoken thought flashed back. "Perhaps this time it may be Valcour de la Roche whose soul will fly out through a slit in his lungs."

"God forbid," ejaculated de Valdeterre,

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involuntarily looking at the youthful figure before him.

"Thanks," said the Little Chevalier gravely. "Again en garde, monsieur."

The sword play began. De Valdeterre, engrossed by the absurdity of his position, paid slight attention to the thrust and feint of his antagonist. A feeling of shame overpowered him. "Is this," he thought, parrying carelessly, "this the end of my long agony of anticipation? *this* the reward of all my preparation? Have I sacrificed my youth, my ambitions, my home, my native land for this — a mock duel with a child, whose" —

"I had thought," the Little Chevalier was observing, turning his wrist so that his sword glided the length of de Valdeterre's blade, "I had thought to see an older man than monsieur."

"Why?" returned de Valdeterre with perfunctory interest. "I am twenty-eight. I was ten years old when" — He left the

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sentence unfinished, and a profound sigh escaped him.

He resumed his inward monologue. "A child! The thing is a farce! I will presently disarm the boy and" —

"And an ill-favored," continued the lad naïvely. Had de Valdeterre been a conceited man he would have detected the note of admiration in the young voice.

He did not reply. He found himself, in fact, suddenly forced to abandon the languidly defensive tactics he had hitherto employed; a lively interest succeeded to the apathy but now dulling his senses. Why, the boy had evidently been trained in the school of his father! There was something almost abnormal in the quick play of the supple wrist, the firm grasp of the slender fingers. He turned lightly about the vicomte, springing from side to side, agile as a young squirrel, laughing gleefully from time to time like a schoolboy in mischief! De Valdeterre felt

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his own mettle rise ; he was accounted one of the most accomplished swordsmen in Paris ; and it was not for nothing that he had anticipated all these years this very encounter with a de la Roche. The recollection of what he had come to do at length blotted out the handsome young face before him ; he saw instead the livid brow of his dead father ; he heard above the mischievous laugh his mother's despairing cry. A berserker rage possessed him ; he pressed his adversary hard, forcing him backward, inch by inch, watching warily for the moment when the now panting lad should give him the advantage he sought.

Suddenly and without warning he felt himself seized with a mortal faintness ; his knees trembled under him, a wave of nausea swept over him, he shuddered from head to foot. His long fast, joined to his already enfeebled condition, and the reaction consequent upon the painful ex-

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citement of the past twelve hours, had done their work. He realized this and his own powerlessness in one of those lightning flashes which open fate itself to the understanding. With a supreme effort he made a lunge at the dancing form before him. The impotent sword flew out of his hand, carrying with it in its flight through the air the plumed hat of the Little Chevalier. He saw the boyish face unaccountably pale within its aureole of bright hair, and the blue eyes wide with joy — or terror — upon him ; then with a roar of despair he dropped like a clod to the ground.

IV

SIEUR BÉBÉ

THE returning senses, after a loss of consciousness, seem to traverse immeasurable distances.

Doubtless they do come back from some remote unimagined world to which, free from that inert mass they ordinarily inhabit, they have sped on joyous wing. For if, in an infinitesimal fraction of time, the mind, clogged by the flesh, can dart to the uttermost parts of the earth and fetch therefrom treasures fit for a king's ransom, is it not conceivable that when "the soul has cast the dust aside" it may journey to the farthest verge of things known and unknown?

De Valdeterre's homeward flight was accomplished slowly : laboring back from

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Saturn, perhaps, or Urania ! He became, first, dimly aware of a murmurous sound, as of far-off voices that died into silence ; then of a touch on his forehead which resembled the fall of a rose leaf. His eyelids rested, heavy as lead, on his eyes ; he was too incurious to move had he been able to do so. But his eyelashes stirred imperceptibly when a single voice again disturbed the silence. This time the sound was nearer and more distinct ; he made a futile effort to recall where he had heard those light, musical, mocking tones.

“Nay,” urged the unseen speaker doubtfully. “You must be mistaken. Look again, *Sieur Bébé*. The thing is incredible. And his thrust and parry so gallant ! I thought more than once, by my life ! that my father’s heir was done for.”

“Hmp ! And so by good right your father’s heir should have been, for play-

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ing the fool after so mad a fashion. Done for, forsooth!" growled a second speaker — if one can be said to growl whose voice is pitched near the high C and is thin-noted as a piccolo. "No, not a scratch, pardieu. 'Tis naught but a swooning-fit, I tell you. May the devil fly away with a man who goes a-fighting when by all signs he should be abed with a sick nurse about! Thrust and parry! Hmp. A feather-weight more of flesh on Monsieur de Valdeterre's bones and you had surely been slain. Had you no thought of" —

"Nay, *Sieur Bébé*," interrupted the first speaker a trifle haughtily, "you will leave me out of the question, if it please you. Not a scratch, say you? not a drop of blood anywhere? I declare again that the thing is inconceivable!"

"And I say again, may the devil fly away with the imbecile who adventures into a duel with his twelve ribs standing

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out from his body like the hoops about an empty cask! Brrr!"

The last expression was like the string which jerks a wandering kite to the ground. De Valdeterre opened his eyes, aware in a flash that this talk, which he had heard idly, as one hears the lap of waves on an outer wall, concerned himself.

He had, on the instant, the sense of a vanishing presence; in truth he had, later, in his mind the blurred vision of a face, which was, and was not, like a meteor at twilight. But his conscious glance fell upon a wood fire in an open fireplace; the leaping flames illumined the brass fender, and tall fire-dogs, and the twisted brass pillars which upheld the high, carved wooden mantel above. His gaze wandered mechanically around the strange room; the walls were hung with paper representing, in a series of panels, a green deep-bosomed forest, with

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Greek temples in the background, and a procession of nymphs winding in and out among the purple-trunked oaks to the music of the flutes and cymbals in their upstretched hands. In the broad space above the mantel the procession was interrupted by a portrait hung against a background of dark red; on either side tiers of wooden racks held a varied collection of weapons; the burnished hilts of swords, the handles of daggers, poniards and creeses sent out fitful gleams of light into the gathering gloom. A single pair of rapiers, holding as it were the place of honor, were crossed beneath the portrait. De Valdeterre paused in his scrutiny of his surroundings to stare and stare again at the face looking out from the heavy gilt frame. At length overwearied with the effort of memory, he closed his eyes and sighed heavily. At the same moment a woman's voice somewhere in the distance, old, thin, and

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quavering, began to croon ; far away as it sounded, he heard distinctly the words of the familiar little hymn : —

*“ P’tit Jésus, mon frère,
Oh, mon Jésus si doux,
Il n’est rien sur la terre
Que j’aime autant que vous.
Jésu ! Jésus !
Jésu ! dis lui que je l’aime
Toujours, toujours le même ! ”*

Ah ! his mother, sitting on his bed beside him in her white ball-dress, with his hands in hers, had sung this as a lullaby to her ten-year-old boy, her baby ! the very night before his father — Oh, but he knew it now, that face ! — the dark, smiling face of the Chevalier de la Roche, graven, as it were, with the point of a sword on his youthful memory. He groaned, turning angrily upon his pillow to seek the portrait again. But this time a figure standing beside the couch obstructed his vision.

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The man looking down at him with small, quizzical, twinkling black eyes was almost abnormally tall,—a veritable Don Quixote in height; not unlike the Knight of La Mancha, indeed, in his general appearance. He wore, it is true, the dress of the time,—gay-colored coat and waistcoat, small-clothes, and hose of silk, and low, buckled shoes; but there was an exaggerated cut to these garments, and a fanciful addition of ribbon and lace to sleeve and undervest, which gave an *outré* touch to his costume. His hair, slightly powdered, was drawn into a bag wig at the nape of his neck and tied with a parti-colored ribbon; his long, lean face was painted and powdered; the hands, over which fell enormous ruffles of lace, glittered with rings. De Valdeterre stared at this singular personage as he had stared at the portrait; then he lifted his eyes to the huge damask-hung baldachin of the bed and sighed again, like one to

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whom the key of a mystery seems hopelessly lost.

“Monsieur revives? So? That is well!” The high-pitched voice accorded marvelously with the grotesque figure which now bent over him. A hand was slipped under his head and a silver cup placed at his lips. “Monsieur will have the goodness to drink,” continued the stranger.

De Valdeterre raised a weak hand and pushed the cup aside. “What is the matter with me? Where am I?” he demanded, his voice sounding thin and querulous in his own ears. “And who the devil are *you*?” he added involuntarily.

“Monsieur will have the goodness to drink” — the shrill voice had become imperious. De Valdeterre meekly gulped down the contents of the cup, — a rich tisane compounded of heaven knows what liquors and spices; he thought that in all his life he had never tasted anything so delicious. Hardly had he drained

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the last drop when it seemed to him that a fire began to course through his veins; life flowed swiftly but painfully back into his heart. He raised himself on his elbow and looked eagerly at the man whose face had regained its quizzical expression. He opened his lips, but before he could speak the other observed dryly, "As to what ails monsieur, an effort of memory will doubtless recall a certain promenade in the garden of the Château de la Roche. Monsieur is truly to be congratulated on the outcome of that — promenade."

"By the holy saints!" cried de Valde-terre, attempting to spring from the bed, "whoever you are, you shall pay for this insult, on the instant!" —

"Not so fast, my friend," interrupted the man, laying a hand on the vicomte's breast and pushing him gently but determinately back on the pillow. "It will require another cup of La Tempête's

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famous tisane to put monsieur on his feet, and still another to enable him to chatter safely of another — duel.”

The shade of irony in the curious voice fairly maddened its victim. He lay panting and glaring at the speaker, tears of impotent rage forcing themselves from under his eyelashes.

“Monsieur de Valdeterre,” resumed the tall man with sudden gravity, “if you will but be quiet I will answer your questions — since they are reasonable and just. You met the Chevalier de la Roche a short half hour ago in the plaisance of the Château de la Roche” —

De Valdeterre covered his face for a moment with his hands; the confused mist at last broke entirely away from his mind; the events of the afternoon stood out, abruptly clear in the white light of a shamed and miserable memory!

— “You were overcome, not by your adversary — I hasten to say this in justi-

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fication of the honored name of de Valdeterre," the high-keyed voice became curiously kind, — "you were vanquished, Monsieur le Vicomte, not by your antagonist, who is, nevertheless, one of the best swordsmen in the Province of Louisiana," — de Valdeterre reflected afterward that the stranger had seemed here to elevate his voice a little, and to glance furtively toward the curtained recess behind the tall headboard of the bed, — "one of the best swordsmen in the Province," the repetition was emphatic, "but by your own physically weakened condition of body."

"Oh!" cried the younger man gratefully, "how I thank you, monsieur;" and he poured out with frantic haste the story of his illness, the long exhausting days that followed, his vigil of the night before as the Sarabande came slowly up the Mississippi, his unbroken fast. "If the Chevalier de la Roche but knew!" he concluded sharply.

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“The Chevalier de la Roche shall be informed.” This time, despite the blur which returning faintness brought to his senses, the young man saw his companion throw a glance toward the recess. He felt sure from this movement that his boyish antagonist was hidden there, and the thought filled him with fury.

“No man,” continued the personage beside the bed in a didactic tone, “has the right to enter fasting upon any important emprise. Monsieur will have the goodness to drink,” he broke off abruptly, stepping to the fireplace. He refilled the cup from a saucepan simmering on the hearth. This time the vicomte drank obediently, albeit somewhat sullenly.

“As to the place where monsieur finds himself, surely that jumps at the eyes! He was conveyed from the plaisance, while still unconscious, to the Château de la Roche” —

“My God!” Again de Valdeterre at-

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tempted to leap from the bed. Of course! Idiot that he was, not to have divined from the beginning that he was under the roof of his enemy, now doubly his enemy! In that enemy's very bed doubtless! Shame and infamy! Leave it? Yes! if the effort cost him his life!

These thoughts flashed like lightning through his well-nigh disordered brain; but the bony hand that once more pressed him downward chilled his heart. The insistent voice dominated his rage. "If monsieur really desires to quit the Château de la Roche — where, nevertheless, he is welcome — he can do so only by remaining quiet for yet a short while. If, on the contrary, he wishes to lodge under the roof of the Little Chevalier for an indefinite period, attended through fever and delirium by the household de la Roche" —

De Valdeterre's eyes humbly besought mercy; then closing them he gathered

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himself together, summoning all the strength of his will for endurance.

“You see before you, Monsieur le Vicomte,” continued the speaker, as if there had been no break in the information given in response to his guest’s demand, but in a more familiar tone than he had hitherto used, — “pardon, monsieur, you will have the goodness to remember that you have honored me by asking me who I am. *Bien*. You see before you Dominique Etienne de Betancourt, protégé of the House of la Roche, and *maître de danse*, by appointment of His Excellency the Marquis de Vaudreuil, to the Court — that is to say, to the *haute noblesse* of New Orleans and the Province of Louisiana ” —

This introduction with a backward sweep of a spindle leg, a flourish of the long arms, and a bow which brought the fantastic face on a level with the vicomte’s own. A faint smile struggled, in

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spite of the gravity of his situation, into the latter's eyes. It instantly disappeared before a certain menacing dignity which stiffened the bedizened figure before him.

"Sometimes known as the *Sieur Bébé*," added the dancing master, with a second flourish and a second bow.

"The *Sieur Bébé*." De Valdeterre echoed the words murmurously and essayed a ceremonious salute with his hand. The name conveyed no special meaning to his ear. Had he been more familiar with the chronicles of the *Petit Versailles* he might, even in his present state of anxiety, have looked with more interest at an individual certainly almost as celebrated there as the marquis-governor himself.

Sieur Bébé, now hard upon forty years of age, had landed in the New World from the same vessel which had conveyed across the ocean from France and his possessions the exiled *Chevalier de la*

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Roche and his family. A raw, gangling youth was Dominique, — a *petit gentil-homme* from somewhere about Rouen, with an unmistakable bee in his bonnet and an admixture of shrewd good sense and warmth of feeling in his composition but rarely found in the cynical world of his day. He attached himself to the chevalier with a humble but dogged persistence which at first annoyed that ruined gentleman, but finally gained him an intimate place in his regard and a niche in the slowly reëstablished House of la Roche. The chevalier amused his leisure by conducting the patchwork education of his raw follower, planting in the more fertile patches of his erratic brain seeds of learning of various and altogether incongruous kinds ; it was even currently reported that the chevalier in the intervals of fighting, building, intriguing, and planting had himself, violin in hand, trained the attenuated legs and awkward

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body into those graces necessary to a profession of which the *Sieur Bébé* was the sole representative in his majesty's southern colony. The sobriquet bestowed upon Dominique in affectionate derision by his pupils, and under which his legitimate patronymic had long since disappeared, had come to be carried by him with a sort of touchy pride, which was as ready to resent any overfamiliar handling of it as to welcome its utterance by those he conceived to have a right to its use.

"*Maître de danse* to the haute noblesse of his colony at large," repeated *Sieur Bébé*.

He seated himself in an enormous fauteuil and extended his legs to their full length, his rosetted shoes resting upon their red heels. "This, *Monsieur le Vicomte*, is my profession. Nevertheless" —

At this point *De Valdeterre* felt rather than heard a vanishing sound beyond the headboard.

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“Nevertheless,” emphasized *Sieur Bébé* complacently, “I am not without some knowledge of the science of surgery and medicine” —

“And the art of spices,” suggested his listener, with a sudden lightness born of relief. “At least the insolent boy has had the decency to withdraw,” he muttered under his breath.

Sieur Bébé nodded. — “And of the various and sundry draughts, potions, and elixirs known as tisanes, possets, balsams, and cordials. The elixir, *par exemple*, of excellent virtue for weakness, which you have done me the honor to swallow, was mixed by mine own hand, which hath a modicum of skill both with the pestle and the stirring-spoon. The recipe I had from *La Tempête* herself the last time the Grand Chevalier and myself, his humble servitor” — he paused abruptly, glancing from *de Valdeterre* to the portrait on the wall. Then he crossed himself and

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hastened a third time to present the cup to his patient's lips.

"The intimate connection between the science of dancing and that of medicine," he resumed, "in the which latter is included surgery, as in the former is incorporated style, punctilio, courtesy, mode, hath until now been slightly understood. The world, as saith Plato the philosopher, moves slowly." The tone had become oracular. The speaker arose and walked to and fro the length of the room, waving his laced arms and keeping rhythm with his words to the click of his heels on the bare polished floor. "By the maître de danse, as by the chirurgéon, the bones and muscles, the nerves and tendons of the body, should be studied thoroughly. Yes, monsieur. Otherwise how may the knee be taught to curve, the foot to glide, the waist to bend at a supreme moment of the minuet, gavotte, or pavane? As to the liver, which, as is well known,

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controls the feelings, misfortune to the dancing master who understands not when or how to administer the physic which keeps that organ in order! Else— ciel!”

The vehement ejaculation was caused by the sudden touch of a hand on his arm. His back at the moment was toward the couch. He turned to find his patient standing beside him, his coat on, the cloak which had been lying across the foot of a claw-footed sofa over his arm.

The two men faced each other for a brief interval in silence, the one dumfounded, the other obstinate. Finally de Valdeterre smiled.

“Your discourse, *Sieur Bébé*—” he began politely.

“*De Betancourt*,” corrected his companion stiffly.

“*Monsieur de Betancourt*, pardon. Your theme is vastly instructive. I shall hope at some future time to hear your conclusions. At present, however” —

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“At present monsieur desires his sword and his — passport,” interrupted Sieur Bébé with a complete return to formality. “He shall have both. The elixir of La Tempête hath done its work. *Bien.*” He fetched the sword from a recess into which it had been flung, and assisted its owner, whose hands still trembled a little, to buckle it about his waist.

Then without further speech, but with his hand under the vicomte’s elbow, he guided him out of the room and along a wide hall lighted dimly by a swinging silver lamp. De Valdeterre was irritably surprised at the strength which seemed to gather into his limbs as he walked; his thoughts flashed back to the sunlit plai-sance, the red-haired, smiling boy, the slithering sword blades; an impotent longing possessed him. As if in answer to his fierce interior cry, his companion remarked as they stopped before the massive cypress hall door: —

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“I must warn Monsieur le Vicomte that the effect of the Indian potion is not lasting, and the temporary vigor it gives is followed by a corresponding lassitude. A hearty meal on arriving at his lodgings is imperative to Monsieur de Valdeterre’s well-being.”

He laid his hand on the doorknob. The gigantic negro, Achille, stepped forward from the semi-obscurity of an alcove.

“Oui, Miché Bébé. Mo connais. Mo li condi” (Yes, Monsieur Bébé. I understand. I will conduct him), he said, smiling intelligently.

De Valdeterre had divined the purport of the brief instructions given to the slave by the dancing master. The blood mounted to his forehead.

“Pardon, Monsieur de Betancourt,” he interrupted haughtily. “I am in no need of a guide—or of a guard from the House of la Roche.”

SIEUR BEBE

“As monsieur pleases.” Sieur Béb  threw open the door.

De Valdeterre paused a moment before descending the steps. “Monsieur de Betancourt,” he began abruptly, holding out his hand, “to you at least I owe” —

“Nothing,” said Sieur B   , his voice rising to its sharpest key ; he ignored the proffered hand. “Monsieur le Vicomte will have the goodness to march, as if the devil were at his heels, to *Le Veau qui T  te* — and his supper. If his legs fail him and he tumble into a wayside ditch and drown, or if a footpad relieve him of his purse, so much the better for a pig-headed idiot who hath gone fasting to a duel ! Brrr !” He slammed the door violently.

Night had fallen. A few stars were out and straggling beams from the just-arisen moon fell athwart the wide walk leading to the tall gate in front of the ch  teau. The gate opened, apparently of itself,

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and de Valdeterre passed out. He skirted along the palisaded wall until he reached the broken road which led to the rampart. The Porte St. Jean, midway between the turreted forts, was still open; soldiers were lounging about the covered walk. The sentry challenged him, as a matter of form it would seem, for he waited for no response from the stranger, but nodded familiarly into the shadows behind him.

The outer streets of the town were dark and deserted; the stranger, stumbling uncertainly along the precarious footways, presently heard behind him the muffled tread of feet; he quickened his own steps imperceptibly. A furtive glance over his shoulder showed him in a patch of moonlight the tall figure of *Sieur Bébé*, who was accommodating his long strides to the younger man's now labored step. He had quite evidently constituted himself a safe conduct to his patient and the enemy of his house.

SIEUR BEBE

De Valdeterre smiled bitterly in the darkness. "Henri Louis Nadan," he muttered between his teeth, "truly thou art to be felicitated on thy advent into the New World! With thy formidable sword on thy hip, the order of the king in thy breast pocket, and thy eighteen years' preparation for thy foe in thy hand and heart, thou hast fallen like a log at the feet of a green boy ; thou hast lain like a double log under the roof of the Chevalier de la Roche ; and thou art escorted on thy triumphant return to thy domicile by a crack-brained dancing master !"

V

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THE Marquis de Vaudreuil was holding in the Government House, at the corner of Levee and Toulouse streets, the usual informal reception which preceded the sitting of the Superior Council. The great arm-chair decorated with the royal insignia of France, on a covered dais at the upper end of the room, was unoccupied. His excellency preferred for this function a seat near the open window through which the river breeze stole softly, bringing with it a salt hint of the distant gulf. The river itself, directly in front of the Government House, and hardly a stone's throw away, was hidden by Perrier's levee, about which were visible the slen-

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der masts of innumerable sloops, brigs, and brigantines. But by leaning forward a little a curve of the mighty stream, with its yellow breast sparkling in the morning sunlight, came into view beyond the bastions of Fort St. Louis.

“Oh! the monster is harmless enough at this moment, I grant you,” cried one of the group of young men surrounding the governor; “but when he shakes himself and rises from between his poor pretense of banks” —

“The fiery Gailliard, meseems, waxeth poetic,” murmured d’Hauterive, rounding his eyes in mock admiration.

— “Why then,” continued the first speaker, passing the interruption by, “he is capable of sweeping the whole of us, bag and baggage, into the Mexican sea. Now according to my plans and specifications,” — he drew a packet of papers from his breast pocket.

“Oh come, Gailliard!” protested half

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a dozen laughing voices. "Are we to be drenched anew with the waters of your canals?"

"Spare us this once, dreamer of dreams, *pour l'amour de Dieu!*"

"Look you, Gailliard, I dreamed last night that five gamins, and no fewer a number of kittens, had been drowned in your sluices!"

"A pest on your ditches and draw-bridges, man! Carry them to the moon—or to the farthest trading-post!"

"All the same," declared Gailliard, not in the least disconcerted by these pleasantries, and returning the papers to his pocket, "all the same, it is a great plan. If Monsieur Blond de la Tour had had his wits about him, he might have drawn it himself. As it is—a dreamer of dreams indeed!" He broke off to scowl a little, recalling the charge.

The governor smiled indulgently at him. "Nay, Gailliard, lad," he said, "'t is

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a pleasant phrase. Happy the man who even at thy age can still dream dreams !”

It was apparent from the relaxed freedom of his excellency’s manner that he was among his familiars.

The Marquis Philippe Rigaud de Vaudreuil at this time was barely thirty years old, though a review of the varied events of his adventurous career might have made him seem twice that age. He was very handsome ; his face was rather a singular one ; his eyes, of that kind whose color seems to change with varying emotions, looked out from beneath a broad smooth brow, cut between the eyebrows by a deep vertical line, which gave a sort of ferocity to the otherwise genial countenance. This note was repeated, as it were, in the harsh lines about the pleasant lips, and again in the square jaw and muscular neck. The general bearing of this favorite of fortune, though courtly and elegant, was imperious ; the well-

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nigh absolute power he had long wielded aboard ship and in the colony had stamped him with an air of authority, which made him to those beyond his own charmed circle as unapproachable as the king himself. He exercised, indeed, the prerogatives of a monarch in all that immediately concerned that Little Versailles in the heart of a wilderness, for whose splendors and ceremonies he was so jealous. For the rest, he was adored by his friends; and he was both feared and hated by his enemies, of whom he had many both at home and abroad.

His stern justice and his somewhat haughty generosity were equally proverbial. But in the more intimate relations of life he displayed a sunniness of temper, a warmth of feeling, and a spontaneous gayety which made him the idol of the younger men with whom he delighted to surround himself. The coterie of brilliant and dashing officers, the men of

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brain and purpose, the dignitaries of church and state who composed for a matter of ten years his court in old New Orleans — these have been immortalized by the chroniclers of the time.

“Dreams sometimes come true, your excellency,” maintained Gailliard stoutly.

“Without question ! Or so at least say the poets. And when thou art the doge of thy New Venice, Gailliard, and art ready to espouse the Mississippi ” —

He interrupted himself to take from a salver presented to him by a liveried servant a folded paper whose great seal gave it the appearance of a state document.

— “Then I will myself give away the wayward bride,” concluded the governor, breaking the seal and unfolding the paper. He frowned as was his wont when his rare moments of leisure were invaded. The frown deepened as he read and re-read the single page ; the contents plainly

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puzzled him. Suddenly a smile curved his handsome mouth and spread over his ruddy face; he broke into almost boyish laughter and looked around the circle.

“Gentlemen,” he said, relapsing into official gravity, “the Little Chevalier left New Orleans this morning.”

A movement of consternation in the group pressing upon him followed this announcement. Gailliard looked significantly at Delaup, who was at no pains to conceal his chagrin.

“But, your excellency” — began d’Hauterive.

“Le Petit Chevalier,” repeated the governor with insistence, “left town at daybreak this morning for the Ste. Catharine Plantations, — on urgent business. It is the request of Valcour de la Roche,” he referred ostentatiously to the paper in his hand, “that the name of the Little Chevalier shall not be pronounced, or even remembered, during this wholly in-

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definite absence — for state reasons. This request, sent to us through the hands of la belle Diane, becomes from the present moment a command from ourself. For state reasons, messieurs.”

If there was wonder or curiosity in the eyes of his hearers, it was cautiously veiled ; for when his excellency took that tone, *ma foi* !

“And la belle Diane?” ventured Gailiard des Marets, with another look at Delaup.

“The beautiful Diane remains,” returned the governor gravely, “to illuminate our fêtes, and to set our young men by the ears, according to her custom.”

D’Hauterive again opened his lips to speak. But as if divining what he was about to say, the marquis repeated slowly and a trifle sternly : —

“You will remember to forget, gentlemen, that my ward, the Little Chevalier,

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has gone into the interior on a mission of importance, which forbids the least mention of his name."

This sentence, spoken in a slightly elevated tone, reached the ears of a young man who, following the major-domo, had entered the room. He paused just within the doorway, as if from a momentary timidity, flushing and paling by turns; then he stepped confidently forward.

This newcomer was unusually attractive in appearance. Tall, broad-shouldered, well-proportioned, with a quick, impetuous gait and a compelling manner, he drew instant and flattering notice from all eyes. His clear-cut face and deep dark eyes, both rather melancholy in repose, lighted with a sort of diffusing brightness when he smiled. His fine figure was set off to advantage by his quiet but elegant mourning dress, cut after the latest Paris fashion. He wore his own hair, slightly powdered, tied with a black ribbon. He

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was still pale and emaciated from recent illness, but his step was firm and assured, his head erect, his voice when he spoke full and clear.

“The Vicomte de Valdeterre,” announced the major-domo, with the precision and expression of a machine.

There was a decided stir over by the window. The advent of the vicomte had already been heralded, and the curiosity which concerned itself about any arrival in the isolated colony had been sharpened by the reports of the young nobleman's wealth, his good looks, and his favor with the king. No one present, except, perhaps, the marquis himself, knew about or recalled the famous duel of near a score of years back, which had sent the victor into exile denuded of his estates. The men of a younger generation, indeed, were unaware that the knightly de la Roche, so powerful in life, so mourned in death, had been under the king's ban.

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His rapidly accumulated fortune and his growing influence had been winked at by successive officials — who had benefited by his service of sword and purse to the feeble colony, or who had enjoyed the friendship or the lavish hospitality of the accomplished courtier. His enemies — he had made not a few — doubtless had spied upon him, but their reports had produced no effect until such time as it had pleased Louis, or La Pompadour, to take note of them.

Among the Indians, who feared this powerful leader, the chevalier was reputed to bear a charmed life; his death in a brilliant skirmish with a Great Sun of the Natchez and his warriors had been for a long time discredited by his red foes. They declared that he had been spirited away from under their very eyes at the moment a tomahawk had split his skull in twain, and that he bided his time, awaiting his hour of vengeance, in

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Oyé-chi-chi-tah, a small, thickly wooded island in the Mississippi River shunned by the tribes with superstitious dread as the abode of the "half-living."

Among his friends and compeers there was also for many months a belief that with his marvelous luck he had escaped death, and might any day reappear out of captivity—tattered, perhaps scarred with new wounds, torn and emaciated, but insouciant and debonair—as he had done more than once in the past. The certainty of his fate had come at length by a mysterious messenger from the Chickasaw woman known to the colonists as La Tempête.

All this, and a swift impression of that long-ago duel whose details he vaguely remembered, passed in a pained medley through the governor's brain as the young man approached him. He recalled the fact that de Valdeterre was his wife's kinsman, and himself the guardian of —!

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“Monsieur de Valdeterre!” he cried, rising and extending his hand, “welcome to this uncivilized attempt at a town of ours, and thrice welcome among the forlorn band of ascetics before you, who huddle together for companionship on the banks of the Great River! Gentlemen, permit me to present to you my kinsman, the Vicomte de Valdeterre of Paris, France. Vicomte, Messieurs de Courcelles, Le Blanc, de Pontalba, Gailliard des Marets, d’Hauterive, Delaup, St. Barbe” —

As he ran over the names of the gayly dressed throng they saluted, each with that dash of easy camaraderie which becomes second nature to men drawn and held together by the isolation of camp or exile. De Valdeterre, whose self-love had received so rude a shock during the past twenty-four hours, felt himself suddenly soothed and rehabilitated.

“Thanks, your excellency,” he replied,

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bowing low. "Were I but admitted to fellowship with such hermits, I should relinquish Paris and forswear civilization forever!"

His glance, sweeping around the circle, made an imperceptible halt upon two men, both standing near the marquis; they were the same he had seen the day before in the public room of The Sucking Calf. As yet he was unable to disentangle their names from the sparkling list pronounced by the governor. Even in his casual glance, however, he thought he detected upon the face of the older man a latent hostility to himself, veiled under the bland, persuasive smile which acknowledged the presentation. The other and younger man had already laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, and was demanding gayly how he found himself in the famous *apartemente* of Mère Jacqueline.

A few moments of the light exchange

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of badinage which followed sufficed for the desired information. The younger man was Gailliard des Marets; the older, who for some inexplicable reason had become his own secret enemy, was Philippe Delaup, under-secretary to his excellency the governor.

The storm of eager questions concerning the doings of that beloved Paris — hovering ever in the golden distance of every Parisian's dream — which assailed the stranger, had but begun when the folding doors were thrown open and Lu-bois and Grand Pré, king's lieutenants, entered, followed almost immediately by Belleisle, military commandant of New Orleans, and Michel de la Ronvillière, intendant commissary, the secret but relentless enemy of the governor. Other members of the Superior Council came in, and the doors were closed. The marquis dismissed his friends with a wave of the hand, but he detained de Valde-

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terre to say, "Welcome again, cousin of Valdeterre. You will dine at the Palace this day en famille? No? Then to-morrow, and the day after, and every day, an it please you. There will be much to hear and to tell. Apropos, Madame de Vaudreuil, your kinswoman, receives to-night. Do not fail to present yourself."

The vicomte was on the point of excusing himself on account of his mourning, which he had worn somewhat less than a year; but perceiving that the marquis had already turned and was walking toward the dais, he withdrew.

In the antechamber he found Gailliard awaiting him. This place, which on his arrival had been deserted, except for the lackeys and the pages of the house, was occupied by a score or more of men anticipating, presumably, an audience with the governor. De Valdeterre experienced a lively curiosity as he surveyed the mot-

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ley assemblage. Gailliard good-naturedly proffered a word or two concerning some of the more striking figures.

“Yonder beaded and feathered rascal of a Tunica,” he said, indicating an Indian brave who stalked to and fro stolidly, unmoved by the unaccustomed splendors of the Great White Chief’s wigwam, “has, I would wager, half a dozen scalps hidden under his dirty blanket” —

De Valdeterre uttered an exclamation of horror.

“Oh,” explained Gailliard naïvely, “they are not the scalps of white men, but of the Chickasaws or Natchez, with whom we and our allies, the Tunicas, are at war. The government pays one livre the scalp. Half a centime the thousand would be a juster price!”

“The two men in the window seat,” he nodded pleasantly to them as he spoke, “have a concession from his majesty on the Mississippi below Pointe Coupée.

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His excellency's late order to the planters to build levees along the river front has doubtless brought Duvernay and d'Artaguet here to protest, or to beg the loan of a hundred or so negroes to construct their embankments."

A lean and wiry half-breed hunched upon a bench had taken from a leathern pouch a handful of stones, and was poring over them with anxious and intent eyes. "Worthless bits of lead and copper ore!" observed Gailliard with a sting of contempt — "from his excellency's so-called mines. But what will you! The king dreams of the riches of Golconda, and the poor Province must needs try to realize his visions! But come."

They shouldered their way through the increasing throng, passing at the entrance of the antechamber a tonsured priest in the coarse robe of the Franciscan order.

"A message from his excellency of Canada," remarked Gailliard carelessly,

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as if that far-away province lay just across the river. "Whither away?" he added as they descended to the street.

It had been de Valdeterre's intention to proceed at once in search of the captain of the Sarabande. Galled by the ignominious failure of his hopes, balked of his justly desired revenge, sick of himself, he was determined to take passage in the first outward-bound vessel for France, there to forget, if possible, the garden of the Château de la Roche; that said everything! As for the *ordre du roi* granting him the possessions of the Chevalier de la Roche, that should remain null and void. Let the red-haired boy keep his father's unlawful gains! What good would they do him, Henri de Valde-terre, when the enemy who should have groaned under their loss was cold in his grave, and could not even know?

But he kept his own counsel with regard to his plans, and presently he found him-

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self at a table in a snug corner of one of the private rooms of *Le Veau qui Tête* with his new acquaintance, who attracted him strongly.

The bottle between them was hardly needed to unloose their tongues ; at the end of a half hour they were exchanging, if not confidences, at least opinions, with the freedom of old friends. De Valdeterre in the first pause, seized with a desperate longing, made a bold plunge. "Monsieur des Marets, may I ask without indiscretion" — he began, but paused, confused and embarrassed by his own vivid recollections, — "will you tell me something of the young — I mean of the present — of the Little Chev—"

Gailliard leaned forward and touched his wrist with an arresting finger. "Pardon, Monsieur de Valdeterre," he said gravely, lowering his voice, though the room, save for themselves, was empty, "the — person — after whom you were

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about to inquire left town this morning for an indefinite stay in the country. You will, I imagine, do well to remember, like the rest of us, to forget the name and even the existence of such an individual for state reasons, by order of his excellency the governor."

De Valdeterre bit his lip, listening to this enigmatical piece of advice, but bowed a silent acquiescence, having, it must be confessed, heard it already from the governor as he entered the council room an hour or two earlier.

Gailliard, as if to ward off further question, delighted, moreover, to have what his friends would have designated a fresh victim, plunged into a detailed description of his great plan.

He belonged, it appeared, to the corps of royal engineers, and he had long cherished the idea of intersecting the town of New Orleans with a series of navigable canals, which, locked and gated, would

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serve as convenient waterways, drain the water-sogged land, and avert disaster during those terrible inundations from the river, so dreaded by the inhabitants of the young city.

He spread his maps upon the table and drew his forefinger along certain lines crossing and recrossing the parallelogram indicating the town. "There should be, according to my plan," he explained, "a number of greater arteries fed direct from the river, faced with solid masonry, and provided with sluices and drawbridges at certain distances. These, properly, should come in at the head of Custom House, St. Louis, St. Anne, and Hospital streets. The intersecting waterways would be on Chartres, Bourbon, and Burgundy, or perhaps on each of those streets which are parallel to the river. Then instead of unsightly ditches which, as you may have observed, at present surround each block, we shall have

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broad rippling streams confined between substantial walls of stone " —

The speaker's eyes sparkled as he proceeded to describe the fairylike picture, as if it hung before his mortal eyes. De Valdeterre, tricked out of his sober senses, caught the enthusiasm, and hung, breathless as the engineer himself, over the colored maps.

When, an hour or two later, he bade his host good-by and crossed the courtyard to his lodgings, he was almost light-hearted. He hummed gayly under his breath a strain of a new chanson current in Paris, and walked with the careless stride of one who is at ease with himself and the world.

But at the head of the stair, beside his chamber door, his forgotten Old Man of the Sea awaited him.

VI

A VISION OF THE NIGHT

MY Old Man of the Sea !” The thought arose unbidden to de Valdeterre’s mind at sight of the towering figure standing motionless on his threshold, — the black henchman of the House of la Roche. “Yet, more like a genie than an Old Man of the Sea !” he muttered whimsically, smiling in spite of himself ; “and far more capable of bearing me away between his invisible wings than I of carrying him on my shoulders !”

He took the note handed him with a strangely caressing smile by the negro, and passed into the room, where he found Chapron sulking openly. The black, he complained, who had come some hours

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earlier, had not only refused to trust the letter he brought into his, Chapron's, hands, but had threatened him, Chapron, in his hideous jargon with instant dismemberment if he ventured so near as within reach of his huge fist ! Monsieur would do well to be on his guard. It was beyond nature for a man's skin to be black, anyhow ; it argued acquaintance with the devil !

The young man paid no attention to his servant's warning growl ; he had opened the note. Hardly believing the evidence of his own senses, he read and reread it. It was, as he had expected, from the young Chevalier de la Roche.

MY DEAR VICOMTE, — After all, it proved to be neither the *if* nor the *perhaps*. And I regret to say that at the moment there can be no solution of this problem, as interesting to you, I take it, as to myself. I am unfortunately

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called away into the interior on urgent business.

If, however, on my return,—of which you shall be duly notified,—you find yourself desirous of entering my garden on the same terms as those agreed upon yesterday, I shall be most happy to entertain you there—*à outrance*, that is to say, until the problem shall be finally solved.

Meantime, my dear Vicomte, for reasons which relate solely to my own affairs, I trust to your honor to maintain absolute silence concerning our late meeting.

I remain, dear Monsieur de Valdeterre,

Most respectfully yours,

VALCOUR DE LA ROCHE.

“Impertinent young dog!” exploded de Valdeterre with rage, pacing back and forth with clinched fists. “How dare he address me in this familiar fashion! He deserves to be spitted like a cock-sparrow!”

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He forced himself to a semblance of quiet, and returned by the hands of the messenger the following curt lines:—

TO THE CHEVALIER DE LA ROCHE,—
Monsieur de Valdeterre is honored by the condescension of Monsieur de la Roche. The longing of Monsieur de Valdeterre to gaze again upon the beauty of the garden in question is hardly to be restrained. He therefore entreats the owner of the said garden to shorten his absence as much as possible.

The wishes of the Chevalier de la Roche shall be strictly observed.

(Signed)

HENRI LOUIS NADAN DE VALDETERRE.

Jan. 6, 1752.

“So, I remain !” he cried aloud when the negro had saluted and retired. “So, I remain. For boy or no boy, by the memory of my mother, I will fight him—

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à outrance!” He brought his fist down on the table heavily as he registered this vow.

“Meantime, my dear Vicomte” — He was again perusing the note, with the vision of a red-haired boy dancing before his eyes, and the memory of a smiling face under the broad-brimmed hat almost disarming his anger. “Saucy dog!” He flushed for the hundredth time at the recollection of the firm thrust, the delicate feint, the bold sweep of the keen blade. “But quite evidently his absurd varletship is held at his own valuation in this New Versailles, since the court is solemnly charged by the governor himself to forget the existence of Monsieur Valcour de la Roche! So be it. But, my Little Chevalier, I will await your return, and pardieu! I will go and see you in your garden — though I should never get out of it!”

The same night he came out of The Sucking Calf, where he had supped alone

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in one of the upper chambers sacred to the gentry. There was clatter enough in the popular café behind him, but except for a light in the guard-house opposite, and the warning cry of a night watchman making his first round with his staff and his lantern, the streets and the Place d'Armes at his right hand were already dark and deserted, the sky was overcast with clouds, the river breeze was freighted with a chill moisture. He drew his cloak more closely about him and walked slowly along Rue Chartres, bent on getting a breath of open air, and perhaps surcease from bitter thoughts, before mounting to his apartment. He paused in the deeper shadow of the brick Church St. Louis, and debated within himself as to whether he should turn riverward and see the Sarabande at her moorings once more, or cross the town to the ramparts and reconstruct in the obscurity that Château de la Roche which had sheltered

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him the night past for a brief hour, and which, he suddenly reflected, actually and by order of His Majesty Louis XV. belonged to himself, if only he chose to take it. And by the gods he *would* take it ! Yes, and grind the House of la Roche yonder to powder !

Opposite to where he stood was the rambling, chalet-like building which he had noted on his arrival the day before, the dwelling of the Capuchin monks, with the large gardens and orchard spread out in the rear. At his left hand stretched that long narrow passageway between Chartres (or Condé) and Royal streets — at the present day known as the Alley of St. Antoine. It was then a dark and precarious footway. De Valdeterre, the question settled in his mind, was on the point of turning into this alley, and so on to the Porte St. Jean, when a light appeared at its upper end. He stepped instinctively back into the shelter of the church wall.

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The light, as he soon saw, came from torches carried by a couple of negro men. They walked slowly, their black faces obscured by the resinous smoke from the pine splinters. Behind these came two other negroes, stalwart and broad-shouldered, bearing between them a highly ornamented but mud-bespattered sedan chair; on the further side of the chair strode a tall man wrapped in an ample cloak and wearing a slouched and feathered hat.

The watcher caught but a momentary glimpse of this pedestrian, his attention being immediately riveted on the occupant of the chair. This was an ancient dame of so fantastic an appearance that he rubbed his eyes to make sure he did not dream. Her shoulders were muffled in parti-colored drapery, from which her head seemed to arise to a prodigious height. She wore, in fact, one of those complicated and extravagant head-dresses

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known as the *fontanges* — edifices of ribbon and hair surmounted by a peak of lace mounted on brass springs, which dated from the gayest days of Louis le Grand. Her lean cheeks, seamed and lined like a withered pear, were artistically treated with red and white paint accentuated with grotesque *mouches*; her lips were artificially reddened, her eyebrows blackened into coquettish arches, from beneath which peered a pair of sharp sunken eyes. De Valdeterre smothered an incipient laugh. But desire of laughter suddenly died of itself in his throat.

Immediately behind the sedan chair came a second pair of link-boys, black as charcoal; following them, on foot, picking her way through mud and slush daintily, as though across a meadow starred with daisies, a maid. She was attended by an elderly negress, turbaned and coifed, who carried a bag containing, doubtless, the slippers, fan, and other fanciful para-

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phernalia of her young mistress. The girl's face, set about with the frills of a great hood of flowered silk held out by wire, shone like a star within the backward-blown cloud of pine smoke from the links; the hooped figure was entirely enveloped in a cloak of brocaded silk, of a pale pink color; but a white hand holding the throat ribbons in place, and the small feet in clocked stockings and chopines were visible. An unaccountable thrill passed through Henri de Valdeterre's veins. He leaned forward, and drew quickly back, the blood hammering his temples and pounding into and out of his heart, as the young woman turned her shining eyes full upon him. Did she see him, or no? He could not tell. She had already passed on, but he could have sworn that a mysterious half-smile had curved her beautiful lips.

He heard confusedly a shrill voice directing or reproving the sedan bearers ;

A VISION OF THE NIGHT

he stood rooted to the spot until the little cortège skirting along the cypress fence and locked gates of the Place d'Armes had reached Rue St. Pierre and turned riverward. He followed its progress by the dancing lights, and saw it finally wind around the corner of Levee Street and disappear in the direction of the Palace.

Then, like one suddenly freed from tension, he drew a long breath and walked rapidly to *Le Veau qui Tête*. There he summoned Chapron and astonished that not easily astonished individual by desiring him to lay out his court dress — at once.

VII

DIANE

THE Vicomte de Valdeterre, having made obeisance to his kinswoman, the haughty and not too popular Marquise de Vaudreuil, and having made the tour of the salons on the arm of the marquis-governor, found himself, about eleven o'clock, standing with the dark-eyed, vivacious Alys d'Hauterive near the grand stairway in the hall of the Palace.

The hall and the adjoining rooms on either side, under the soft light of innumerable candles in silver sconces and crystal chandeliers, presented a scene of kaleidoscopic brilliancy; in one salon card tables were set out, and many of the older men and women were hushed and eager

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over piquet, bassett, and other games of chance ; in another, gay young cavaliers, ruffled, laced, periwigged, and powdered, moved about, chapeau under arm, heels clicking, saluting beautiful women in wide paniers, petticoats of gold or silver embroidered stuffs, buckled slippers, and jeweled headgear. Lackeys in the Vaudreuil livery passed in and out with silver trays, offering to the guests in tiny silver cups the spiced liqueurs appropriate to le petit Noël — Twelfth Night. From a railed gallery overlooking the hall, where the musicians were stationed, came the slow, subdued strains of the minuet or pavane. At the upper end of the great salon, visible from where de Valdeterre and his companions stood, Madame de Vaudreuil, in magnificent toilet, was enthroned in a chair of state emblazoned with the arms of France, to receive the homage of the miniature court. The marquise liked to be treated *en reine*. The

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governor, on the contrary, for all his punctilio in matters pertaining to his position, could on occasion lay aside his state ; he mingled freely with his guests, followed everywhere by admiring eyes while he exchanged gay jests with the men and addressed the women with the highflown gallantry of the period.

The new arrival from the French capital had been presented to many of the latter ; they had without exception bestowed upon the stranger — whose good looks were enhanced by his handsome court dress — an attention which at another time might have flattered his vanity. But he was preoccupied ; though not, as he had been for the past day and a half, with self-accusation and vain regret. His eyes traveled furtively from each hooped and powdered beauty he met, in an unacknowledged search after the face which had shone like a star through a cloud of acrid smoke, the eyes which

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had shot him one swift inscrutable glance from beneath a frilled hood.

He sighed softly, listening to the light sallies of Mademoiselle d'Hauterive. Suddenly he caught sight of the dame of the sedan chair. She was seated at one of the tables in the card room, absorbed in play. Divested of her wraps and in the full blaze of light, she appeared more grotesque than ever. Her neck, from which bone and tendon stood out like veritable chevaux-de-frise, thought de Valdeterre, and her skeleton arms were bare, both blazing with jewels; her stiff stomacher, long and pointed, compressed her attenuated form and gave her the look of a wooden effigy.

Mademoiselle d'Hauterive followed the direction of the vicomte's gaze and broke into girlish laughter.

"That is Madame de Ste. Hermine," she volunteered; "wonderful, is she not! They say she came in with His Majesty

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Louis the Fourteenth. I know that she figured in his court along with my own grandfather when it was gayest. And she continues to wear the costume which his majesty admired three quarters of a century ago. She also continues to ride in a sedan chair because the gallants of her time carried her links. Oh, hers were *beaux yeux*, they say ! She is half blind now, and deaf as a stone ; but she is the best player at piquet in the Province."

De Valdeterre's tongue absolutely refused to frame the question at its root. He waited.

"She is the great-great-aunt of"—Mademoiselle d'Hauterive paused, for Gailliard had come hastily up.

"Mademoiselle Alys," he cried, "are you forgetting the king cake ? Ah, de Valdeterre !" He reached a friendly hand to the vicomte. "You are the man I was looking for. Will you conduct Mademoiselle d'Hauterive ?"

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The vicomte gave his arm to the young girl ; they accompanied Gailliard to a large room which ran across the rear of the Palace. It was lighted like the others with candles made of wax from the *anemiche*, or candleberry tree, native to the region. The high-backed chairs, the carved buffets and cabinets filled with glass and silver, suggested the state dining-hall. Around the immense mahogany table in the middle of the room were gathered all, or nearly all of the younger element which graced Madame de Vaudreuil's annual Fête des Rois. At the upper end of the board, on an enormous silver salver, reposed the remains of the *gateau de roi*, or king cake. It was, or had been, a great hollow brown circle sugared and fantastically ornamented with colored *dreages*. The Marquis de Vaudreuil was presiding in person over the ceremony of the cutting. Bursts of expectant laughter echoed to the vaulted ceiling, as the young

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women advanced in turn and timidly, or with assurance, cut with a silver knife a small slice from the fateful ring. As de Valdeterre and his two companions entered, a girl was bending over her task ; there was a momentary but profound silence in the glittering throng. De Valdeterre trembled inwardly at sight of the drooped head with its bright tresses entangling the light. As she arose he beheld once more, and this time in its full loveliness, the face which had wooed him hither, and which, until this moment, he had sought in vain.

The unknown, a girl of nineteen or twenty, was somewhat above the medium height, of full yet slender and erect figure, with arms and neck of dazzling whiteness. Her face, a perfect oval with the exquisite coloring of a seashell, was framed by an aureole of auburn hair wound in coils about a beautifully shaped head ; it shaded a low, broad, and very

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white brow. Her eyes were of that dark violet-blue which at times seems velvety black. The eyebrows and the long lashes were dark; the mouth and chin were a trifle haughty, but became exquisitely feminine when, as now, a smile illuminated her face.

A scarf of pale green gauze floating from her shoulders was caught by jeweled clasps to the paniers of the same shimmering tint, which were looped over petticoats of rose-colored brocade. A half wreath of pink roses adorned her head.

She stood smiling mysteriously with downcast eyes, as if she breathed some invocation while she crumbled the bit of cake in her hand. For full half a minute no one moved, the hush deepening around her; the women bit their lips nervously, the men leaned forward eager and excited, each calculating his own chance in case —

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All at once a little cry escaped her lips. The bean, detached from the crusty morsel, slipped through her jeweled fingers and slid along her gown to the polished floor.

Several men sprang forward ; but de Valdeterre had already stooped and picked up the precious jetsam, cast at his very feet, — a dark brown smooth sea-bean such as is found along the Gulf coast, — and was stepping across the intervening space. Meantime a sort of genteel pandemonium reigned. There was a simultaneous clapping of hands, an irrepressible rush forward, a chorus of exclamations in as many tones as there were individuals present. A repressed undercurrent of pique betrayed itself in some of the feminine voices.

“ Bravo, Diane ! ”

“ Reine ou rien, comme toujours ! ”
(Queen or nothing, as always.)

“ Diane’s luck ! ”

DIANE

“Whom will she choose, la belle Diane?”

The subject of the tumult stood perfectly still, one hand resting on the edge of the table, the other hanging by her side. De Valdeterre, pausing before her, bowed almost to the floor. A sudden hush came again, like the stillness which follows a storm; a pin dropping on the bare floor could have been heard. From the card room, undisturbed by the observance of the old Spanish custom, came the sharp echo of an angry ejaculation; the dreamy tones of the violins in the hall stole in and lingered like an undertone to some fairy interlude.

“Mademoiselle Diane, you will make your choice from among our young men,” suggested the governor — it seemed to those at his elbow a trifle nervously.

“Certainly, your excellency,” returned the young woman. She lifted her white eyelids slowly and de Valdeterre flushed

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crimson as the velvet dark eyes looked frankly into his own. La belle Diane hesitated; it was but for the fraction of a second, yet to all present, and most of all to the vicomte, it seemed an eternity.

She put out a hand as if to receive the bean, but laid her palm, instead, in his.

“You may keep the bean, monsieur,” she said, “if it please you.”

If! The blood whirled like a maelstrom from his heart to his head. The deafening tumult arose again; this time the undertone of pique, and perhaps of something more bitter, included male as well as female tones.

If! De Valdeterre opened his lips, but before he could utter a word he was stepping out with the hand of the beautiful Diane in his, at the head of a quickly formed column. An order had been transmitted from the governor to the musicians in the gallery; they were playing a slow and stately march.

VIII

THE FARANDOLE

THE column — with its two leaders hand in hand, but mute as marble statues of faun and dryad — passed into the hall, keeping time to the music, entered the grand salon, where each couple bent in courtly reverence before Madame de Vaudreuil, wound its way in and out among tables and card players in the smaller salon, and passed, still with grave, rhythmic step, out upon the broad gallery facing the river and the glimmering moon. Once, twice, thrice, back and forth; the time had quickened insensibly, the measure became faster and faster yet as the dancers reëntered the wide vestibule and swept again through the dining-hall and the smaller reception

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rooms. The march had become a wild galop; the gay length of the column turned and twisted upon itself like the shining coils of a serpent. The bosoms of the hooped dames and the peruked gentlemen rose and fell with the unwonted exertion; the sound of their red-heeled shoes on the parquet was like a patter of hail.

Suddenly de Valdeterre felt a closer clasp of the firm fingers on his own; he lent himself, tingling, to the pressure which guided him, deftly unnoticed, out of the whirling coil. Looking at him for the first time, Diane laid a finger on her lip, with a sparkle of mischief in her eyes, and drew him swiftly across a small ante-room, through a curtained doorway, and into a draped boudoir lighted by a single shaded lamp. She released his hand and threw herself, panting, on a sofa embowered in palms, sweeping her skirts aside, at the same time, in mute invitation.

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Some moments passed before either found breath for speech. De Valdeterre sat like one in a dream watching the rise and fall of the beautiful white bosom half revealed, half concealed by costly laces, the turn of the firm chin, the curve of the red lips. He was aware that the flushed face turned toward him was like one he had seen or known somewhere, sometime. But he had no desire to trace to its source the fleeting resemblance. It was enough to look. Oh, to be able to look forever !

In his life of twenty-eight years, which had not been without adventures of many and varied kinds, woman had until now played but a small part. His mother alone of her sex had influenced him. His whole spirit, his whole physical being as well, had been set to one goal, — vengeance on his father's slayer ; and the lighter emotions, such as play around the lives of most men, had not existed for him. But the

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supreme moment which comes to all had come to Henri de Valdeterre, taking instant and overwhelming payment for all his past indifference. A new world had opened before him, with whose divine possibilities he felt the very air about him charged. At once humble and exultant, he longed to kneel at the feet of this exquisite creature and kiss the hem of her garments; he desired to sweep her away like a master into some remote region where they two might dwell together alone.

Diane dropped her eyes before the mute ardor in his and trifled nervously with her fan. "My breath was gone completely," she said, in the slow rich voice which, he thought rapturously, suited her so well. "I am, in truth, unaccustomed of late to fêtes and festivals. I have been nowhere before, since" — she paused and her tone grew grave. "I have been in mourning for my father," she concluded.



PHILIPPE DELAUP . . . STEPPED INTO THE BOUDOIR

THE FARANDOLE

“And I,” said Henri, feeling this to be already a sacred bond between her and himself, “and I for my mother.”

She bent her soft gaze on him. “It is truly too soon for me to be out in the gay world again,” she continued musingly and as if to herself; “but I am here by the express wish, which is a command, of the Marquis de Vaudreuil.”

“Neither did I desire or intend to come,” de Valdeterre hastened to say, “until I saw” — he arrested himself, confused. To cover his embarrassment he took the bean from his waistcoat pocket and regarded it intently, lying in the palm of his hand.

“So, mademoiselle,” he said gayly, “I am your king by the grace of the Epiphany. And you are” —

“Mademoiselle de la Roche,” said a sneering voice at the door, and Philippe Delaup, parting the curtains, stepped into the boudoir.

IX

HEREDITARY FOES

DE VALDETERRE'S pale face grew livid ; he recoiled as if he had received a mortal blow. But partly mastering himself, he arose to his feet and stood looking down at the young girl who kept her place, lifting questioning eyes to the intruder.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," said the vicomte, in a voice which despite effort betrayed his agitation. "In the excitement of the farandole, no one has done me the honor to present me. Permit me therefore to present myself. Mademoiselle, I am Henri de Valdeterre." His bow, like his tone, was formal.

"Monsieur de Valdeterre," Diane sprang to her feet and swept him an ex-

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aggerated reverence, "permit me, in my turn, to make myself known. Monsieur, I am Diane de la Roche."

She fronted him with a girlish expectant laugh, which died into silence before his continued gaze; a pleading look dawned into her lovely eyes. They remained there facing each other for a moment, Delaup glancing from one to the other with half-veiled enigmatical eyes.

Suddenly Diane's tall figure stiffened, her head went up proudly, a disdainful smile parted her lips. She placed the tips of her fingers on Delaup's proffered arm and quitted the room without even so much as a backward glance.

De Valdeterre remained, he knew not how long, in the perfumed and dimly lighted nook where a new and glorious world had leaped out of space to his hand, and where that world had crumbled into dust. A storm raged in his breast and shook him, physically, from head to foot.

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At first he could see nothing clearly in the chaos which reigned in his soul ; horror possessed him at length to find that he was overwhelmed not so much by the knowledge that he, de Valdeterre, had made merry, as it were, over the dead body of his father with the daughter of that father's assassin as that he himself had sought to slay the father of Diane de la Roche, and had actually lifted a murderous hand against her brother !

For now, indeed, he tracked the fleeting resemblance to its spring, and he groaned as he remembered how exactly the boy's arrogant upthrow of the head chimed with the same movement on the girl's part ; how the face, though not the same, was yet in truth the very same — only a thousand times more lovely, softer, more feminine and graceful. The same glint, as of sunset, in the abundant hair ; the same witchery of eye and of speech.

“Surely, I am but the plaything of

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some grotesque and terrible fate," he muttered ; "and nothing is left for me but to fly fate — and Diane — at once and forever !"

As he glided unnoticed through the hall to the front entrance of the Palace, a glance into the card room showed him the sphinx-like Madame de Ste. Hermine surrounded by an excited group of men and women. She was talking in a high, quavering voice — he had heard it already at the Château de la Roche crooning the lullaby his mother used to sing. Instinct as well as reason told him that the venerable court favorite of Louis the Magnificent, banished from her beloved Paris by the exile of the head of her family, the Chevalier de la Roche, was relating the story of the duel in the *clos*, and the consequent enmity of the great houses of la Roche and Valdeterre.

In the greater salon beyond, he had a glimpse, to remain graven forever on his

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memory, of Diane, stepping a minuet with Delaup to the slow strains of almost ghostly delicate music. One small hand held up the voluminous skirts, freeing the daintily clad feet for their stately movements ; her red lips were parted, her eyes sparkled, a bright color had flamed into her cheeks.

From a coign of vantage over against the dancers, *Sieur Bébé*, in the full glory of ribbon, lace, and brocade, towering above the onlookers, was beating time inaudibly with his bony hands.

.

The governor, at midnight, called loudly for *de Valdeterre* ; his excellency was unaware until later of the *contretemps* which had hurried his kinsman away from the *Fête des Rois* ; he had, nevertheless, feared some such *contretemps* from the moment his ward had signified her intention of obeying the summons, issued before the *vicomte's* arrival.

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He desired the young man to assist at the concluding ceremony of the fête. This was the manumission, according to an accepted custom of the Epiphany, of one of his slaves. Standing at the upper end of the grand salon, with his hand on the jeweled hilt of his sword, he awaited the appearance of the favored black who entered a slave, awed and trembling in every limb, and who went out a free *homme de couleur*. The fortunate chattel on this occasion was a man long past middle life, whose face was scarred with marks of servitude; he knelt before his master, rolling the while fearful eyes toward the disapproving countenance of his mistress, and kissed the governor's feet, one after the other, in token of submission and gratitude. Terrified by the clapping of hands which followed the words pronouncing him his own master, he sprang up and fled like a hounded deer from the room.

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The same night, it may be recorded in passing, before setting out for the fête, Diane de la Roche had bestowed the priceless boon of freedom on her major-domo, Achille, who nevertheless prayed to be allowed to remain in her service.

“Our cousin of Valdeterre” — began the marquis on taking leave of his ward a little after midnight.

“The Vicomte de Valdeterre, may it please your excellency,” interrupted Diane icily, “is the hereditary enemy of our House. He is, moreover, a most disagreeable person. I wonder that your excellency should have allowed me to remain in ignorance as to who was my partner in the farandole.”

“Oh, these women! these women!” murmured the great marquis, following her retreating figure with half-vexed, half-amused eyes, and thinking, doubtless, of his own haughty and capricious spouse.

X

BEHIND THE PORTIÈRE

THREE months had elapsed since Henri de Valdeterre had set foot on the shores of a new world. During this time he had ceased to be a stranger ; he had become a leading figure in the gay court of the grand marquis. His romantic history, as told by Madame de Ste. Hermine, and supplemented by fragments of recollection dragged to light from the memories of older colonists, had but increased the popularity won by his appearance, his open-handed generosity, and his courteous and elegant address. The accident which had made him at the Fête des Rois the partner of the beautiful Diane de la Roche had been at the time a nine-days' wonder ;

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the Little Versailles had buzzed with it; it had been the basis of a hundred extravagant wagers, and at least one serious encounter, among Diane's followers, who by a tacit understanding ranged themselves in a solid phalanx, as it were, between that injured young woman and the man who had, albeit unconsciously, insulted her by even so much as touching the tips of her pretty fingers.

All sorts of reasons were alleged for the presence of de Valdeterre in New Orleans, — one at least coming marvelously near the truth: that which claimed that he had come to take possession, governor or no governor, in the name of the crown, of the unlawfully acquired property of the late Chevalier de la Roche. As no hint escaped his own lips of the royal order lying half forgotten in his desk, or of the more sinister motive which had prompted his voyage, the stir, except so far as concerned his personal relations with Made-

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moiselle de la Roche, gradually died away. He was accepted as one of those gentlemen adventurers who at that period sought in the New World excitement for its own sake, at the cost of purse, sword, and even life. He continued to live at The Sucking Calf, where in the apartment of Mère Jacqueline, refurnished by Chapron to suit the exigencies of its new occupant, he entertained at cards, wine, and gossip, after the fashion of his age.

It was a period of great splendor in the young city. The Marquis de Vaudreuil and his ambitious wife left far behind them the almost republican simplicity of their predecessors, Bienville and Perrier. Though harassed by exorbitant demands from the crown, cramped by want of funds for his growing government, troubled by continual disturbances on his frontier by savage hordes of Natchez, Chickasaws, and other turbulent Indian tribes, and further made uneasy

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by the machinations of his intendant Ronvillière, the marquis yet contrived to find time and heart for the routs, balls, and pageants, in and out of door, which have left so golden a memory, to this day, in the French heart of the old town.

In all of these, both his kinsman and his ward bore a conspicuous part ; Diane surrounded by her band of adoring cavaliers, always radiant, always disdainful, and often openly hostile to the man she was pleased to term her hereditary foe ; de Valdeterre on his part apparently oblivious of the presence even of his fair enemy, paying assiduous court to other demoiselles of the circle, notably Mademoiselle d'Hauterive. And if chance, or the wave of advancing or retreating contredanse or promenade brought them within reach of each other, there was instant and ostentatious pressing forward of his or her friends to prevent an untoward meeting.

BEHIND THE PORTIERE

“There is blood between them!” The phrase uttered oracularly in the very beginning, perhaps by Madame de Ste. Hermine or Delaup, had been accepted as a sort of watchword.

De Valdeterre, yielding to the situation with outward calm, was inwardly confused and perplexed by his own tumultuous emotions. He told himself incessantly that he remained in Louisiana, spite of Fate, for the sole purpose of one day paying a second visit to the Little Chevalier in his garden; to this he was bound in honor. As for Diane, he assured himself twenty times a day that he hated her with a fervor proportioned to the intensity of his brief moment of infatuation in the curtained boudoir at the Palace. Yes, he hated Diane de la Roche; there was blood—his father’s blood—between them. Yet he could not put her out of his thoughts; wherever he went he saw her only, heard only her gay

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laugh, listened for her rich, slow voice, — at the daily promenade on the levee, in the Place, at church or Palace ; over the card table, in the *salle d'escrime* above the jingle of glasses, the clatter of blades, the swagger of oath or drinking-song, his mind turned, like a lost child, around the charmed spot where she stood, radiant, smiling, insolent, hostile. Oh yes, he hated her ! And when he should have crossed swords once more with her brother — he laughed aloud at thought of the red-haired lad in his plumed hat, with his sister's saucy eye and her mettled upthrow of the head — why then, back to France, and good-by, God be praised ! to Diane de la Roche.

But until the Little Chevalier saw fit to return — !

For many reasons besides the command of the governor, and Gailliard's warning, he had refrained studiously from making any inquiry concerning the absent boy.

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Once or twice, finding himself near the dancing master, he had almost put a question. But the *Sieur Bébé*, as if divining his intention, had as often stalked away, though not without exchanging a look of secret and not unfriendly intelligence with his quondam patient.

Meanwhile his life in the colony had become filled with other interests, which kept pace, after a fashion, with these secret emotions. He was much with his kinsman, the governor, and learned somewhat of the interior workings of the government, the quarrels and wranglings which lent zest to the sittings of the council, the intrigues and the plots within plots which gave to the Little Versailles a curious likeness to the greater Versailles at home. Besides, he carried in his head several unsolved problems.

For example, there was Delaup.

His apartment at The Sucking Calf comprised an anteroom, an alcoved bed-

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chamber, which also served as a sitting-room, the sleeping-closet of his valet ; and a small cabinet where he had stored his hunting paraphernalia, his portmanteau and traveling-chest, and other odds and ends not in daily use. The cabinet was reached by a long, narrow passage-way leading out of his bedchamber.

One night, at a late hour, he traversed the passage without a light, knowing that he could in the dark lay his hand upon the object wanted, a case of hunting-knives. He stopped short as he pushed open the unfastened door of the cabinet, arrested by a single line of light on the wall opposite, vivid in the darkness. He stepped cautiously across the small room ; the light lay along a heavy curtain which hung before a door, barred and bolted on the hither side. There was without doubt a room beyond, occupied at the moment ; for he heard the murmur of a voice or voices. He moved noise-

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lessly back, stooping and groping among boxes and bales for the case of knives ; but as he arose he heard, or thought he heard, his own name, uttered in a tone which seemed familiar. He drew the portière softly aside ; the door, shrunk from the jamb, had left on one side a slit-like opening a couple of inches wide. His eyes, glued to this crack, fell upon a table lighted by a single candle, in a tall candlestick, in the middle of a fair-sized room. A litter of papers — letters opened and unopened, loose sheets, notebooks, memoranda, and the like — strewn the table, upon one end of which a small teapot steamed over the blue flame of an alcohol lamp. A man in an armchair was leaning forward reading a letter, his large face illuminated by a smile of satisfaction. He was quite alone, in his shirt sleeves, like a man in his own house.

“ Delaup ! ” breathed de Valdeterre,

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dropping the curtain and starting back abashed.

“What tricks the imagination can play one,” he muttered, once more in his own room. “I could have sworn I heard him pronounce my name !”

The scene haunted him. “Where are Delaup’s lodgings ?” he asked carelessly of Gailliard later.

“Delaup ? He lives in his own house in Toulouse Street, a very handsome house, by the way. Why ?”

“Oh, nothing ! — Then what the devil was he doing after midnight, alone, in Rue St. Pierre ?” The last query was an unuttered one. Thus the still-unsolved Problem Delaup had had its beginning.

XI

A MORNING RIDE

ONE morning, in the early days of April, Gailliard invited his fast friend the Vicomte de Valdeterre to accompany him on an inspecting tour up the Tchoupitoulas Road, the young engineer having in charge the work on the growing levee above the city. The two rode booted and spurred, from the government barracks, along Levee Street by Government House and the Palace, past the handsome private residence belonging to Bienville, late the governor of Louisiana, now in France in semi-disgrace — an exile from the town he had founded ; and so on, through the Porte St. Louis beside the fort of the same name.

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The road, a rusty weed-fringed track, ran between the river and the indigo plantations of the Jesuits, which lay without the city and beyond the terre commune bordering the upper rampart; the fields, blue-green with springing crops, were picturesque with turbaned negro slaves — men and women, who moved under the whip of overseers up and down the rows of young plants, or around the open vats, chanting weird, unintelligible refrains. There were a few Indians among them, stolid, silent. “Scornful alike of white master and black slave,” remarked Gailliard, “and revolting against labor from their scalp-locks to their red heels !”

“Then why — ?” began de Valdeterre.

“Firewater,” interrupted Gailliard sententiously.

The river under the clear sky, sparkling in the brilliant sunshine, rolled majestically gulfward, tranquil and seemingly content.

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But the engineer pointed out to his companion signs of an approaching flood ; the frothy eddies lapping the grass-grown levee were burdened with drift ; enormous logs shot into air in midstream, stood upright for a moment and plunged back into the tawny depths ; here and there beyond the line of levees projecting headlands, miniature peninsulas, crumbled silently, or dropped bodily with a heavy splash into the swirl.

“By heaven !” exclaimed Gailliard as they continued their course up the river-side, after an examination of the levee-work going forward under the direction of his subordinates ; he rose in his stirrups and gazed long and earnestly at this mysterious Mississippi for which de Valdeterre had come to have a respect bordering upon awe. “I tell you, Henri, the monster is capable of sweeping us all, bag and baggage, into the Mexican sea” — this was Gailliard’s favorite formula.

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“If the Superior Council, dolts and cabbage-heads as they are, would only—even at this late day, consider my plan!”

The good fellow, according to his wont, builded dream after dream upon the airy buttresses he had contrived, until his new Venice shone a dazzling city under the horizon of his imagination.

De Valdeterre listened indulgently, looking now at the ardent speaker and now at the river, but oftener into the unfathomable depths of the swamp at his right hand. For all signs of habitation were now left far behind; the great cypresses, hung with long streamers of funereal moss, stood knee-deep in a black sea, on whose still surface water lilies, gold-centred, and spidery bayou lilies gleamed supernaturally white; clumps of fanlike lataniers indicated higher spots of ground in the morass, where dry footing might be had by hunter or fisherman.

“Dangerous places, these *cyprières*,”

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Gailliard interrupted his rhapsody to observe. He reined in his horse as he spoke. "By the way, it was hereabouts, if I remember aright ; yes, yonder is the very spot" — he pointed with his riding-whip toward a black lily-starred pool under the drooping moss-hung branches of a water oak — "the very spot where the Chevalier de la Roche killed the alligator known as Le Vieux, which they say had baffled Indian hunters for a century ; an enormous beast. His skin hangs on the de la Roche library wall — Oh, I beg your pardon, de Valdeterre !" His face reddened guiltily. "I had forgotten."

"No offense, my dear Gailliard," returned the vicomte frankly. There was a suppressed eagerness in his tone as he continued, "On the contrary, you would oblige me by telling me something of the chevalier — le Grand, I mean. I have no motive beyond curiosity in asking," he added hastily. "Only, as you know, the

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subject de la Roche is avoided in my presence as if it were a deadly poison."

"Naturally," admitted Gailliard with a dry smile. "There is, after all," he began as they resumed their promenade, "but little to tell. The chevalier's advent in the Province antedates my time, though I knew him later, and, like all who came in contact with him, I admired him extravagantly. If I say anything which is disagreeable to you, Henri, you will do me the justice to remember that you have brought it upon yourself."

"Pray proceed," urged his listener, smiling.

"The Chevalier de la Roche, it seems, reached Louisiana accompanied by his kinswoman, Madame de Ste. Hermine — the Lady à la Fontange, you know," — De Valdeterre nodded, — "and his two children. He was not, as you may suppose, entirely penniless, although the confiscation of his estates and the

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lettre de cachet followed hard upon — upon ” —

“The duel,” suggested de Valdeterre.

“—Still he had many and powerful friends who doubtless supplied him with funds. At any rate, he quickly acquired property, and became at once a power in the colony. He was generous to a fault, hospitable, hot-headed, reckless, brave, loyal — a *preux chevalier*, in every respect, I tell you, de Valdeterre !”

“He was my father’s friend before he was my enemy,” said the vicomte.

Gailliard proceeded to account in glowing terms the various adventures of the Chevalier de la Roche, — on the dueling-ground, at the gaming-table, in the Superior Council, where his voice and his purse had uncommon weight, and among the Indians. He had been greatly feared by the red foes of the Province, especially by those powerful and warlike tribes the Natchez and the Chickasaws ;

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more than once he had detected and defeated their murderous plots — aided, it is said, by a princess of the Chickasaws called by the French *La Tempête*, who was known to be tenderly attached to the chevalier. Many were the thrilling combats he had had with these savage warriors before he met death at their hands. He was accompanied on all these expeditions by a negro slave named *Achille*, a sort of body-servant and major-domo of his household; and often also by that extraordinary personage, the crack-brained caperer, *Sieur Bébé*.

Gailliard related the story of the chevalier's last fight, and of the mystery which for a long time had surrounded his death and burial.

“Poor *Diane* !” he concluded. “She refused for months to believe that her father had been killed ; it was only when *Achille* returned with a token from *La*

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Tempête herself that she abandoned hope."

They rode on some moments in silence after Gailliard had uttered the last words. "Ah, Henri," he began again abruptly, as if following out some train of thought, "you are lucky!—you who are beyond the reach of Diane de la Roche's coquetry. Happy the man who is her hereditary foe!" He laughed, but ruefully and half-heartedly.

"Yes," he went on in answer to a look of surprised inquiry from his companion, "I have scorched in that flame—who has not? Capricious, haughty, cruel, careless, lovely Diane! Continue to hate her, my friend. It is far safer than to love her."

De Valdeterre sought in vain for something to say. But Gailliard either did not observe his silence or found it natural. "Come, it is time we were turning homeward," he cried. They turned their

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horses' heads. "Aïe ! aïe ! the agony will soon be over. For I make no doubt she will bestow her hand on Delaup."

"What !" cried the vicomte sharply. "Monsieur Delaup," he added composedly, "is doubtless a good parti for Mademoiselle de la Roche. He is rich, handsome, and well placed. I scarce know the gentleman myself. He seems to have some grudge against me."

Gailliard laughed. "Reason enough, my dear Henri. Diane, always Diane ! He chanced to hear you, the very first day of your arrival in New Orleans, inquiring the way to the Château de la Roche. That you did not go there at all, that your casual inquiry had naught to do with Mademoiselle de la Roche, that you are in fact the foe of the beautiful Diane, has not altered the result ; the fuse was lighted by that accidental spark ; I told him so at the time."

"And the Little Chevalier ?" The

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words escaped de Valdeterre's lips before he knew it. He crimsoned painfully.

"The Little Chevalier!" echoed Gailliard gayly; he glanced around with pretended anxiety. "Oh! we are at a safe distance from the Palace! Let us pray that the winds of heaven carry not the forbidden name to his excellency's ears! Well, what of the Little Chevalier, vicomte?"

"Why does he not return? How long does he mean to leave his sister to manage the affairs of la Roche?"

Gailliard looked keenly at the agitated speaker; his own manner suddenly lost its careless gayety. "The Little Chevalier," he said gravely, "stays away with the full consent of Mademoiselle de la Roche. And, if you knew the beautiful Diane as well as I do, faith, you would understand that she is quite capable of managing the affairs of her house."

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De Valdeterre bowed, understanding that the subject was definitely closed.

.

He gave his horse into the hands of an orderly at the government stables, and bidding Gailliard good-by, he sauntered out a side street toward the rear of the town. For once Diane de la Roche was absent from his thoughts; he had laid the ghost, according to rule, by speaking to it; his talk with Gailliard, though actually telling him nothing he had not already heard, had relaxed the tension of his overstrained nerves; he felt an unwonted lightness of heart; his mind, free for the moment, took in with keen interest, and as if he saw them for the first time, the physical features of Bienville's little city by the Mechéchébe. The islets of Blond de la Tour, nearly all palisaded with rough-hewn cypress stakes driven into the ground, were also moated, so to speak, like the Château de la Roche, with

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open ditches. The squares near the river, and toward the Church St. Louis, the core of the town, were well built up with cottages and two-storied houses, half brick, half cypress, with sunny open galleries and tiled roofs. In some of the streets forest trees were still standing; the advancing spring had clothed these and the vines and shrubs which overtopped the palisades in tender green. Through more than one open gateway the passer-by caught glimpses of symmetrical rows of blossoming waxberry trees, or of wild cherries, snow white with bloom. Few people were abroad, though as he walked on he could hear the hum of life busy behind closed gates. An occasional heavy vehicle lumbered along, or a dragoon, with clatter of harness, rode by.

He reached the rampart and turned southward on his way to a long low building between St. Louis and Toulouse

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streets, — the Charity Hospital, — where a man he had known in Paris, a broken-down adventurer, lay sick of a fever.

As he approached the tall, whitewashed, wooden gate, a horse attached to a stake near by, frightened by the shouts of some boys at play in the shadow of the stockaded rampart, reared violently, broke his fastenings, and dashed snorting down the street.

De Valdeterre, horror-stricken, noted a child, an infant not more than a year old, sitting unconscious and smiling in the dust directly in the path of the plunging animal. He sprang forward on a run, but before he had made half a dozen steps a woman in the garb of a nun darted into view. She looked curiously tall in her flowing garments as she leaped upward and caught at the flying bridle. De la Valdeterre, pounding along, cried aloud, his heart chilled with terror. He never could quite make out how it hap-

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pened ; the Sister, with a single movement it seemed to him, had turned the frantic horse aside and dragged the child from under his hoofs.

The horse, freed from her grasp, thundered on, swerving but a fraction as he passed de Valdeterre, who slackened his pace.

By the time he came up several women had swarmed to the spot, he knew not from where. One of them wept aloud and wrung her hands, while the child's rescuer berated her in round terms, in a rich sonorous voice, for allowing her baby to run such risks.

"It is such careless mothers as thou, Margot Gros," she said, "whom the good God ought to punish by taking their children away from them. If it happen again that child of thine, or thine, or thine," she whipped fiercely around upon the other women, "be allowed to wander unhanded in the street, by the Holy Vir-

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gin, I will put my own hand upon it, and thou shalt never see it again !”

The women broke into eager protestations ; the infant’s mother still wept and wrung her hands. The nun, whose veil drooped over her face and shoulders, ceased to speak, and sat down suddenly in the dust, cuddling the sobbing baby in her arms and crooning to it. De Valde-terre, pausing beside her, saw that her hands trembled, and that her head drooped and her slender body swayed to and fro, as if she were about to faint.

“Permit me, *ma sœur*,” he said with great gentleness, stooping to take the child from her, perceiving that the mother was too unstrung or too awed to do so.

The nun lifted her head ; the long veil fell aside, revealing to his astonished gaze the face of Diane de la Roche.

XII

FLEUR-DE-LIS

THE simple words uttered by de Valdeterre, or the sight of his downward-bent face, acted like a galvanic shock on Diane de la Roche. She sprang to her feet, clasping the wailing baby to her breast ; and for a moment the foes stood facing each other as they had done once before, in the curtained recess of the palace at the Fête des Rois. But this time neither spoke ; the man fell back a step or two, baring his head before the well-remembered upfling of the girl's, under her flowing veil. She turned to lay the child in the mother's arms. " You will do well to heed what I have said, Margot Gros, and you others, also," she said deliberately, with an ad-

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monitory gesture which included each of her listeners, “or I warn you that Père Lebesque shall put the whole of you under the Church’s ban.”

An involuntary outcry broke from the women, who pressed nearer to each other, huddling the little ones at their knees into the folds of their petticoats. Diane followed her terrible threat with a smile of such infinite sweetness that even her enemy felt it like a benediction ; then, still utterly ignoring his presence, she beckoned to a negress near by, who carried a basket on her arm, and accompanied by this attendant, she passed rapidly down the street.

The women watched her in breathless silence until she turned a distant corner ; then they burst into an uproar of ejaculation.

“Aïe ! Aïe ! But Mam’selle Diane hath a hard tongue !”

“Nay, gossip, but a soft heart !”

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“I know, yes. Oh, but an angel ! that jumps at the eyes !”

“Père Lebesque, who sees already the least slant in the eye ! Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !”

“She scolds roundly, Mam’selle Diane ! Like the Great Chevalier, her father !”

“True, and she hath gold in her throat, like the Great Chevalier, her father !”

“Poor Margot ! But she scourged thee like a dog !”

“Hold your tongues, wooden heads ! Mam’selle Diane did right to scourge me !” cried Margot Gros with spirit. “But for her, as you saw with your own eyes, you miserable imbeciles of mothers, my little Pierre — Oh, where wouldst thou be at this moment, my treasure !” She sobbed, kissing the top of the baby’s head.

“True, yes, as the words of the Holy Father himself !” chorused the others ; and then fell suddenly silent as de Valde-

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terre, whose presence they had forgotten, stepped forward.

“The pious nun yonder” — he began, nodding in the direction taken by Diane.

“Oh, your excellency,” interrupted one of the younger women, dropping a profound curtsy before the handsome stranger, “Mam’selle Diane is not a nun, if it please you.”

De Valdeterre’s interested “Ah?” set loose once more a babel of tongues.

“Nay, but let me speak,” insisted Margot Gros, out of the midst of it, “seeing that it was my Pierre that m’sieu was also trying to save.”

“True, I saw him running, me ! Mon Dieu, but how m’sieu ran !”

“Exactly under the belly of the terrible beast.”

“Aïe ! but it makes the heart bleed to think of it !”

“The demoiselle, m’sieu,” persisted Margot Gros, — “may all the saints bless

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her! — is not a nun. She is a great lady, m'sieu, a demoiselle who could set her little foot if she liked on the neck of the great marquis himself; nay, even on the neck of the king, long live his majesty! Her name, may it please m'sieu, is Mam'selle Diane de la Roche; her father was the Great Chevalier; and my own father, Jean Pellier, fought under him in the wars, and hath at this very moment a pension from Mam'selle Diane."

"Mademoiselle Diane de la Roche." The vicomte repeated the name very slowly, as if to fix it upon his memory. "But the nun's robe —?"

"Oh, ay. No wonder m'sieu is puzzled. Mam'selle Diane hath permission from the Mère Supérieure to wear that robe when she goes forth to the Hospital yonder to carry conserves and wine and fruit to the sick; and to minister to the women and children there."

De Valdeterre had slipped a shining

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louis d'or in the palm of the little Pierre ; he closed the fat fingers over it. "You will do well," he remarked with sudden sternness, moving back and inclining his head in a courtly bow to the group, "you will do well to heed the admonition of Mademoiselle Diane de la Roche, all of you. There is Père Lebesque ; there is, besides, the — guardhouse."

He strolled away, leaving abashed consternation behind him.

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A week later de Valdeterre rode forth from the city again ; on this occasion one of a glittering cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen on horseback and in carriages ; the company, in fact, embraced almost the entire court of the great marquis and his lady, the marquise. The latter sat in the state-coach, drawn by its four white horses, with outriders in livery alongside ; having at her side Madame d'Hauterive. The governor, with most of

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the younger men and women, was on horseback.

The gay cortége, prepared for one of those out-of-door fêtes in which the Marquis de Vaudreuil delighted, passed from the Place d'Armes, where they had assembled, between rows of the admiring bourgeoisie which lined the streets, toward the ramparts in the rear of the town. An escort of dragoons preceded the columns ; Porte St. Jean, the gate in the stockade, was thrown open, the draw-bridge over the outer moat was lowered with a flourish, and the long array swept out. The Bayou Road wound lakeward between wide expanses of *cyprière*. Just without the stockade, skirting the road, were a few country houses, standing on ground that had been raised and drained ; these were inclosed, like the squares of the city, with palisades ; one — green foliage overtopping its more pretentious wall — with red-roofed mansion embow-

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ered in oaks and magnolias showing in the distance — was the demesne de la Roche which de Valdeterre now saw for the first time since the day of his encounter with the Little Chevalier. The sight of it aroused a fierce longing for the moment when he might once again face — *à l'outrance!* — the impertinent boy with a man's wrist of steel.

He made an effort to bring his attention back to what the governor was saying ; they were riding abreast and somewhat in advance of the others.

“My dear Henri, I am sure of it ! De la Rouvillière would undermine me if he could — that goes without saying. The commissary intendant of this Province, be he Lenormant, de la Rouvillière, or another, is the traditional enemy of the governor, whomsoever the governor may chance to be. Every ship which leaves this port carries, I know, a packet of charges and complaints against me from

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Michel de la Rouvillière. The commissary intendant has even dared to insinuate to his too-ready listeners that the Marquise de Vaudreuil sells drugs and medicines to the colonists ! By Heaven, as soon as I may, without implicating those at Versailles who have betrayed him, I will force the intendant at the point of the sword to eat his own words ! ”

“ But as to the letters ? ” suggested the vicomte.

“ Yes, I know what you would say, Henri. De la Rouvillière, treacherous as he is, would not stoop to the baseness of opening or reading private letters. There is nevertheless some one who has access to my papers ; who reads my letters and dispatches and reports their contents to Paris, or sets them in the air here. It must be some underling, a lackey perhaps in the pay — My God, I know not of whom ! ”

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De Valdeterre's mind gave a swift backward leap—the man in his shirt sleeves, sitting beside a table strewn with papers, his large face lighted by a malicious smile, the tea-pot hissing over its lamp at his elbow !

He looked over his shoulder at Diane de la Roche, riding with Delaup at her bridle-rein. The report of her approaching marriage must be true ! She was pointing with her whip to that corner of the château park where the plaisance lay concealed behind the protecting palisade. Her light laugh floated to his ears: he thought of the Huntress on her pedestal yonder, of the sundial in its grassy pasture, of the mirror-like pool in its ring of emerald ; he pictured Diane sitting with her betrothed in the shadow of her marble namesake, or bending with him over dial or fountain. — No, the spy could not be Delaup ; Diane, or the man whom Diane might choose for a mate,

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would, if an enemy, be at least an open enemy !

“Halt, ladies and gentlemen !” The governor’s voice had recovered its wonted tone of gayety. “We are arrived at our castle in the greenwood !”

As they advanced along the Bayou Road, there had appeared here and there in the swamp, glimpses of open spaces where the latanier grew in spreading clusters, and where great live-oaks stretched their limbs above a grassy sward dotted with wild flowers. The cortége had now turned aside, following a less beaten track, and paused on the edge of one of these islands, a wide, velvety green reach in the neighborhood of the spot where to-day stands the famous shrine of St. Roch.

The ground rose to a slight ridge crested with noble trees ; then sloped gently away on the farther side and merged into a marshy coulée, along whose

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outer edge ran a small sluggish stream,—one of the many little tributaries of the Bayou St. Jean.

A cry of wonder and delight broke from the lips of the junketers. The *coulée* and the low banks of the bayou were a blaze of color under the sunny April sky; *fleurs-de-lis* of every imaginable hue—dark and pale blue, rose, yellow, brown, dusted with gold, crimson, white, violet—filled all the open, rippling like a variegated sea to the green foot of the ridge.

But a brief moment for a contemplation of this picture was allowed by the bustling master of ceremonies; cavaliers and demoiselles alighted, carriages were emptied of their occupants, and horses led away by waiting grooms; rugs were laid under the trees, the Court was seated in a semicircle about the Marquis and Madame de Vaudreuil. At a signal from the former the prearranged pastimes

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began, with a padegaud-shooting, by a dozen or more Colapissa Indians, a tribe from the beginning friendly to the colonists.

The sport of the "padegaud," similar to the popinjay-shooting in vogue at the same date in England and Scotland, consisted in shooting for a prize with bow and arrow, or firearm, at a wooden bird bedecked with feathers and ribbons, the performance ending with a series of leaps and contortions around the target, accompanied by the throwing of hatchets, and with deafening yells, imitative of the tribal war-dance.

At the close of the present contest, which was not sufficiently novel to provoke more than a languid interest among the spectators, the trophy was awarded the victor, a filet of tafia heated the throats of the defeated marksmen, and the Colapissas departed, leaving the riddled padegaud behind them.

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It was Gailliard who suggested a pade-gaud tourney among the young men. The proposition was hailed with noisy enthusiasm; the forlorn-looking bird was set in place, and one after another of the gallants of the Little Versailles stepped forth to make trial of his skill—with varying success—under the eye of the Grace and Beauty of the Province, declared the governor with a courtly bow which included all the women present.

When the turn of the Vicomte de Valdeterre came, there was a hush of expectation, for the handsome Parisian had on more than one occasion justified his title to first place among the sportsmen of the court. His hand was steady as he lifted the pistol, his eye unclouded as he took aim, his heart-beat absolutely normal as he fired. But as if magnetized by a pair of mocking blue eyes in the shining circle about Madame de Vaudreuil, his weapon swerved imperceptibly, his

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bullet went ever so little aside of the beaded eye of the padegaud.

Delaup, who came next, planted his bullet full in the centre of the mark, splintering the head. A murmur of applause greeted him as he turned—a subdued murmur, for Monsieur Delaup, in spite of his position, was not a favorite. Above it, the voice of Mademoiselle de la Roche rang out clear and incisive :—

“Bravo, Monsieur Delaup ! Bravo and thanks ! Louisiana against France ! New Orleans against Paris ! Victory !”

She had leaped to her feet, her perfect figure in its close-fitting habit of dark green was outlined against the gray trunk of the ancient oak, her eyes sparkled, her cheeks were flushed. A frantic clapping of hands, provoked less by her words than by her beauty, echoed through the wood. Delaup, stepping to her side, raised her hand to his lips, and bowed his

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thanks for her, like one who has the right to do so.

“Treason, mademoiselle, treason!” cried the marquis ; “ we shall have you shut up in the Fort St. Charles ! ”

“ Or the Bastille,” amended d’Haute-rive gayly.

“ Oh ! let it be the Bastille, your excellency,” retorted Diane with a steady look at De Valdeterre. “ And the sooner monsieur reports my treason to his majesty, the better.”

“ For shame, Diane ! ” said Madame de Vaudreuil sternly.

“ Your excellency,” said the vicomte coolly, addressing the governor, “ beauty can utter no treason. Besides, madame,” he turned to the marquise, “ France, on occasion, knows how to be deaf ; Paris, when to be dumb.”

A renewed clapping of hands greeted this speech, which was uttered with a smile. The governor, as if to prevent fur-

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ther exchange of hostilities, called hastily for the next number on the programme ; and amid the bustle which succeeded, de Valdeterre moved quietly away through the trees. He descended the slope and stood gazing with unseeing eyes over the field of lilies, endeavoring vainly to calm his anger. He would have liked to slay the beautiful Huntress where she stood !

“Bah !” He threw out his hands as if dismissing the subject at once and forever. He stooped and plucked the lily which blossomed at his feet. “Blue as the eyes of Alys d’Hauterive,” he murmured, looking into its heart, well knowing that the eyes of Alys d’Hauterive were not blue, but black as the berry of the wild bamboo-vine.

“Monsieur de Valdeterre.” The low voice at his ear was unknown to him, and yet strangely familiar ; he turned quickly. Diane de la Roche stood beside him : her bared head was bent a little

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forward, her bright hair falling over her face ; her blue eyes sought his frankly. "Monsieur de Valdeterre." She paused a second and continued : "If your father died by the hand of mine, my father died because of yours, in exile and far from the land he loved. You, who have the favor of king and court ; you, who are a man and free, and may do what you will, and go where it pleases you, why do you stoop to hate me, who am but a woman? I, at least, have never harmed you."

The lily dropped from de Valdeterre's nerveless hand. The attack was so unexpected ; the appeal was in such contrast to Diane's former disdainful manner, her plaintive tone so gave the lie to her brutal words flung at him a bare half hour earlier,—that he remained absolutely incapable of speech.

Diane glanced over her shoulder ; following her eyes, he saw that Delaup had detached himself from the group under

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the trees and was coming rapidly toward them. "Why do you hate me, Monsieur de Valdeterre?" she persisted.

But Delaup had reached her side, breathless. "Mademoiselle," he said, "Madame de Vaudreuil has sent me to fetch you to her. Pardon, Monsieur le Vicomte." And with a low bow to de Valdeterre, the secretary held out his hand to Diane, who, as on a former occasion, laid the tips of her fingers on his sleeve, and with a haughty movement of her head turned away.

At the same moment a tumult arose in the very centre of the fête. There was a sharp outcry, a scurrying to and fro, a rapid mounting of horses, a jingle of stirrup and spur.

De Valdeterre sprang up the slope and ran to the spot where his horse was fastened. "What is it?" he demanded of Gailliard, who was adjusting his saddle-girth.

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“A runner from above Ste. Geneviève Plantation,” — they swung themselves simultaneously into their saddles, — “with news of another Indian massacre.”

They galloped after^d the governor, already flying along the Bayou Road toward Porte St. Jean, leaving the frightened women to follow with the lackeys and the unopened hampers.

XIII

THE UNDER-SECRETARY

THE Place d'Armes, when the governor, throwing himself from his foam-covered horse, entered its upper gate, presented a scene of picturesque animation. The four gates stood open according to custom ; a motley crowd surged in and out of these, pressing to one or another of the several centres of interest in the dusty trampled square. One focus was a booth just outside the Ste. Anne gate, where *estomae mulatre* (gingerbread) and tafia, a sort of rum, were for sale ; here half-breed Indians, free blacks, Canadian boatmen, and *Kaintuck* traders mingled freely together, swearing, singing, and quarreling over their liquor. Over against the Church St.

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Louis, a man in the sober garb of a merchant, just arrived from France in the Dromedaire, now swinging to her moorings on the levee, was haranguing a group of workmen concerning certain new doctrines creeping into men's heads in France. But the principal point of excitement, and that toward which the governor and his suite made their way, was near the river, or levee gate. A company of soldiers from the barracks formed there a compact outer barrier, within which stood several of the king's officers, and two or three members of the Superior Council, — Fleurian, the attorney-general, Belleisle, military commandant, and Allard, lieutenant du roi. In the midst of them, in an attitude of sullen dignity, was the runner — an Indian lad about nineteen years old, a brave of the Chickasaw nation. He stood a little apart from the officers, a striking figure in his deerskin leggings and tunic ; his red blanket drawn over

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one shoulder exposed his bare breast, tattooed with the totem of his tribe. His scalp-lock was adorned with a couple of tall eagles' feathers ; his belt was edged with a heavy fringe of beads. His hands and his belt were empty, but a rifle and a knife with acacia wood handle lay on the ground at his feet.

He lifted sombre eyes to the governor as the latter paused in front of him.

"The rogue refuses to talk, your excellency," said Major Belleisle in an irritated tone. "He unburdened himself of a few words when he first came, but his mouth this half hour hath been as close as an oyster. Faith, if I had my way, I would set him to the stake and scorch him until" —

The governor lifted an arresting hand.

"No wonder the dog is dumb," ventured Fleurian in his ear. "He hath been jostled as rudely as if he came at the head of a band of painted warriors,

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instead of alone, and as a messenger of warning and distress."

De Vaudreuil beckoned the lad nearer ; the tall figure remained motionless and rigid, the eyes fixed on space ; the sensitive nostrils, widening and quivering, alone showed signs of life.

But the set features suddenly relaxed ; the right hand was extended ; a slow smile parted the thin lips, and a musical murmur burst from them.

The ungainly form of *Sieur Béb * had pushed its way through the circle. The dancing master strode up to the runner and paused ; he exchanged, in a tongue unintelligible to the hearers, a few words with the Indian, who took his hand and stroked it caressingly.

"It is the young chief, *Chivonah*, the adopted son of *Cheville Rouge*," *B b * explained to the governor. "He brings a message to the Great White Chief. It is for the ears of the White Chief and

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not for these dogs of soldiers — The words, may it please your excellency, are not mine, but Chivonah's," Bébé hastened to add, as an angry growl ran around the group.

The marquis smiled behind his hand. "Say to my red brother that it is well," he returned. "Let him follow us to the Government House ; and you, *Sieur Bébé*, will you, since you know the lad " —

"He is the son of *La Tempête*," Bébé interjected gravely.

"Ah !" The governor looked with lively curiosity at the runner, who, hearing the name of his famous mother, drew himself up proudly.

"And of the *Chevalier de la Ro* " —

The governor stopped the speaker with a warning glance, and proceeded, — "Since you are acquainted with the young chief, and with the tongue of the *Chickasaws* " —

— "From long service in his ma-

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jesty's Indian wars, your excellency," interjected Bébé again.

— "You will therefore accompany us and act as interpreter."

Sieur Bébé removed his ribboned cha-peau and made a sweeping reverence ; then touching Chivonah on the shoulder, he bade him follow the Great White Father to the Council Lodge.

The news brought by Chivonah was indeed grave. The Chickasaw Indians, who since the day Bienville first set foot on the soil of southern New France had been the implacable foes of the French, continued, though reduced to a remnant of their former greatness, to harass the settlers in the interior. Latterly they had received into their band the scattered warriors of the once powerful and always bloodthirsty and treacherous Natchez nation, which some years before had suffered defeat and dismemberment at the hands of the French. Thus mutu-

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ally strengthened, the murderous allies swept out from their fortified villages, and swooped down upon the defenseless planters, or attacked the feeble garrisons of the little forts scattered up and down the river. La Tempête, the great medicine woman of the Chickasaws, regarded with almost superstitious reverence by her people, had more than once before now, for the love it was said that she bore the Chevalier de la Roche, sent a timely warning to the whites.

Chivonah, producing from his belt his mother's well-known token,—warrant of his own good faith,—told the story of the massacre of habitans in a settlement some twenty miles above the ruins of Fort Rosalie on the Mississippi, and of a projected descent by a chosen band of warriors upon the plantations below. This mission was fraught with great danger both to himself and to La Tempête. The latter, remaining during her son's absence

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in the camp of the allied Chickasaws and Natchez, assured the white chief, by the mouth of Chivonah, that the young warrior on his return would assume the war paint and fight with his own tribe.

“A strange people,” mused the governor, looking absently at the lad, when the interpreter had ended the interview with this statement. “It might be safer,” he added abruptly, “to hold the redskin a prisoner. There may be treachery” —

“Your excellency,” the *Sieur Bébé* broke in proudly, “there is treachery neither in the blood of *La Tempête*, nor in that of *La Roche*.”

“True, *Bébé*; we have in times past tested both. See to his safety, *Belleisle* ;” he turned to the commandant ; “and let him carry our thanks to *La Tempête*. Let him say to her that the French, whose numbers are as the leaves of the forest, will know how, when the moment arrives, to meet the Natchez and the Chickasaws

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— and that one of our young braves was born to put a bullet in the heart of Chivonah.”

The dancing master repeated this speech, word for word, to the Indian, whose eyes lighted ferociously. He laid a finger on the totem which decorated his breast and said in hesitating but intelligible French, “Chivonah proud ! Chivonah strong ! Chivonah proud with blood from great red mother ! Chivonah strong with blood from great white father ! Bullet no kill Chivonah !”

De Valdeterre remained, an interested spectator of this novel scene, until the young chief had stalked away with Belleisle, seeming to dominate his escort, toward the Porte St. Louis, whence he would glide into the fastness of the *cyprière* and disappear ; then he hurried out. The entire population of the town by this time had swarmed to the square ; at the barracks preparations were under way for

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the sending out of several hundred regulars, including a contingent of Colapissa Indians ; on the levee provisions and ammunition were being hastily stored on board the boats which were to follow, by way of the river, the landward expedition ; in a building in St. Peter Street, facing the square, registers had been opened, and the Company of Bachelors — a company organized under the direction of Bienville in 1735, composed of unmarried men — was reorganizing. Nearly all the cadets of good families about the town had already enrolled themselves ; Gailliard and D'Hauterive had just signed as de Valdeterre entered, coming up from a hasty survey of the fleet. He placed his name beneath theirs, and a little later found himself by appointment of the Council captain of the company, de Contre Cœur being first lieutenant. The afternoon had drawn on ; he repaired with other officers to the Gov-

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ernment House, and there passed a busy evening examining maps, receiving instructions, and gaining such information as could be extracted from reports of former and similar expeditions. The governor remained in his private office planning and advising with Belleisle and other senior officers in command ; the under-secretary, Delaup, unable to volunteer because of his official position, about nine o'clock pleaded a sudden indisposition and withdrew.

Toward midnight Gailliard and de Valdeterre proceeded to *Le Veau qui Tête*, with the intention of supping together. As they set foot on the banquette in front of the café, Gailliard held back, peering up the dark street.

"What is it, des Marets ?" demanded his companion a trifle impatiently.

"Nothing. I thought I had caught a glimpse of Delaup. But I was mistaken."

De Valdeterre stepped back in time to

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see a shadow disappear into the unlighted alley. He stood a moment irresolute ; and when they had ascended to the small room reserved for Monsieur Raguet's most favored clients, he communicated, with sudden determination to the engineer, certain suspicions which had for some weeks been gathering in his mind.

"Impossible !" burst out Gailliard, throwing up both hands in amazed repudiation.

"Impossible. Yes, you are right ; and I dare swear I am a suspicious villain. But — the Dromedaire has just come in and — come, let us not think of it further !"

"Nay, Henri ; we must at least set doubt at rest. It would be cruelly unjust to Delaup to drop the matter now."

They crossed the court and mounted the stair to the vicomte's rooms. Chapon was carousing genteelly in the public room with other body-servants ; but a

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light burned on the table ; pipes, tobacco, and cards were laid out, and a decanter with glasses placed on a tray at hand, showing the old man's care of his young master.

The two men seated themselves and waited in profound silence, though the sound of their voices could not have drifted through the closed and curtained door. At the end of a half hour de Valdeterre arose. "I am heartily ashamed of my doubts, Gailliard. But as you say — Come along, man, for God's sake, and let us get it over !"

He passed softly out and along the passageway, followed closely by Gailliard. Opening the door of the cabinet, they slipped stealthily in, guided by the broad line of light which again lay on the dark curtain opposite. De Valdeterre, with a hand which shook a little, drew the portière aside. Gailliard, peering over his friend's shoulder, saw through the crack

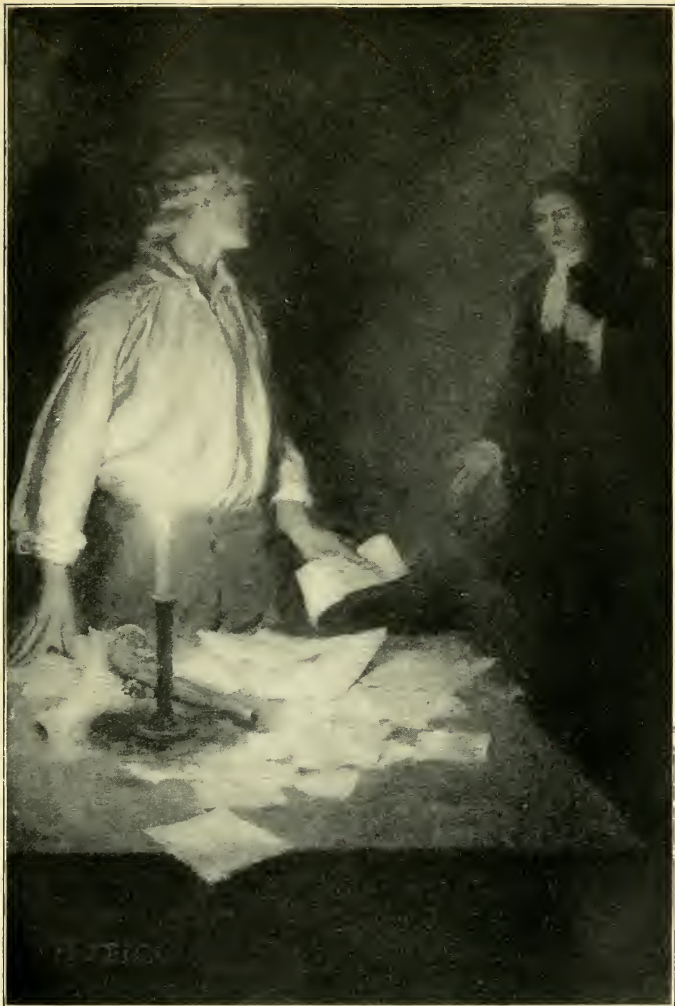
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— Delaup. He was in the act of holding a dispatch — with the government seal upon it — over the steaming spout of the vessel beneath which burned the blue flame of an alcohol lamp. A confusion of papers — letters, folded documents with staring seals, memoranda, three-cornered slips having the appearance of billets-doux — a collection larger even than that seen by de Valdeterre on a former occasion — strewed the table. The light of the candle, full upon the secretary's face, showed an eager gleam in his small eyes. "Aha, Monsieur le Marquis," he said aloud with exultation.

"'T is his habit to be ever talking to himself, the fool," whispered Gailliard excitedly. "Wait a bit !"

"And you, my fine Vicomte Henri Louis de Valdeterre" —

"At your service, Monsieur Philippe Delaup," said de Valdeterre politely, wrenching back the rusty bolt and throw-



"AT YOUR SERVICE, MONSIEUR PHILIPPE DELAUP"

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ing open the door. Gailliard, with a grin on his face, stepped into the room behind the vicomte.

Delaup remained for one second transfixed with surprise ; the paper in his hand fluttered to the floor. Then straightening himself with an assumption of dignity, he demanded sternly, " By what right, messieurs, do you enter my room without invitation in such rough fashion ? "

" Monsieur Delaup," de Valdeterre coolly returned, " will please remember that he called me ; or at least that he took the liberty of using my name for some purpose."

Delaup had recovered himself. " If you do not leave this room at once," he declared insolently, " I will facilitate your departure."

As he spoke he picked up a pistol which served as a weight to a pile of letters, and leveled it with a finger on the trigger at his unwelcome visitors. But Gailliard

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was too quick for him; he leaped forward and caught in a grasp whose strength was proverbial in the country the hand that held the pistol. "Not so fast, monsieur," he said gayly. "Now, de Valdeterre !"

De Valdeterre looked down at the mass of papers. "To the Marquis de Vaudreuil," "To His Excellency the Governor of Louisiana," "To the Marquis de Vaudreuil," "To Madame de Vaudreuil," "To the Chevalier de Contre Cœur," "To Madame de Coulanges." He pushed dispatch after dispatch aside as he read the superscriptions letter after letter.

Delaup became livid; he bit his lips until the blood ran, writhing under Gailliard's iron grasp. "How dare you — !" he began.

"No heroics, if you please, monsieur," suggested Gailliard.

"The mystery is solved at last," said de Valdeterre contemptuously, stepping

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back. "The governor hath been much perplexed over the unaccountable escape of late of state secrets. The unlocking of the dispatch boxes hath been a pleasant and doubtless a profitable amusement for his excellency's under-secretary ! The theatre of the performance too hath been well chosen," — he glanced around the shadowy room, — "but unfortunately for the performer, dangerously near — others."

"Spy !" hissed Delaup.

"His excellency," continued de Valdeterre imperturbably, "will profit by the discontinuance of the play."

Delaup's nerve deserted him ; his face from livid became green, then purple. "You will — you will inform his ex— ?" He gasped for breath.

"Neither Monsieur des Marets nor myself," said de Valdeterre haughtily, "desires to play the rôle of informer. You will, under the direction of Monsieur des

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Marets and myself, gather up these papers and dispatches — which I make no doubt have just arrived by the Dromedaire; those which you have opened, you will reseal after the recipe you are in the habit of using” —

Delaup winced.

“You will return letters and dispatches to the box which I see lying on the floor by your chair; you will close the box with the false key in your possession” — Delaup uttered an ejaculation of rage — “and hand the key to Monsieur des Marets; then you will summon your confederate” — Delaup started violently, and Gailliard turned an inquiring eye on his friend; — “you will by his hands return the box to the secret bureau of the governor — nay, protests are out of place! Your messenger, whose courage may need strengthening, will be accompanied to the Government House by Monsieur des Marets, who

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afterward will proceed with him to the river, and there under his eye drop the false key into the waters of the Mississippi. Monsieur, I have finished." He inclined his head in ironical courtesy.

Delaup opened his lips to speak, but closed them again, and proceeded sullenly and methodically to follow the orders of the vicomte, his two unbidden guests looking on in silence. At length he locked the dispatch box and handed the key to Gailliard ; then walking to an outer door, attended politely by the engineer, he opened it and whistled softly. Almost immediately a man appeared, a sleek, crafty-looking individual whom Gailliard recognized as a sort of hanger-on about the Government House. He gave a quick, surprised look at his employer, but instantly composed his face and received the precise and apparently spontaneous orders from Delaup in respectful silence.

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“Come back, Gailliard, when you have finished with him,” said de Valdeterre as the man and his armed jailer passed out.

“And now, Monsieur Delaup,” he continued, turning back into the room where the under-secretary waited impotently his further pleasure, “you will have the goodness to seat yourself at yonder table — where I perceive you have pen and ink, as well as tools for prying into the affairs of household and State — and write your resignation ” —

“A thousand curses on you ! I will not ! D—— you, I will not ! ”

“’Tis a small price to pay for immunity from disgrace,” observed de Valde-terre quietly.

Delaup looked at him, hesitated, and walked rapidly to the table. He seated himself, and with a hand which seemed to have recovered its steadiness, he wrote the formal note of resignation demanded.

“Very well,” said his companion, glan-

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cing over the written page handed him and returning it. "You will fold, seal, and address this document, and see that it is placed in the hands of the governor before ten of the clock to-morrow morning."

"I had supposed that the Vicomte de Valdeterre, having secured it, would have handed the resignation to the Marquis de Vaudreuil, his kinsman, himself," sneered Delaup, heating the sealing-wax over the candle. "Is it possible that monsieur can so far trust the late under-secretary?"

"Monsieur de Valdeterre trusts to the late under-secretary's fear of public exposure," returned the vicomte; "and in this trust he has the honor to bid Monsieur Delaup good-night."

He quitted the room by way of the cabinet, closing and bolting the communicating door behind him.

Delaup waited until the faintly heard echoes of retreating footsteps had died

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into silence ; then he drew some papers from within his inner vest, and waved them above his head, a crafty smile spread over his broad face.

“Very well, indeed, Monsieur Henri Louis Nadan, Vicomte de Valdeterre,” he muttered. “But you may yet have to reckon with the — late — under-secretary.”

XIV

THE MINIATURE

AN extraordinary thing has happened," said Gailliard the next morning, as he entered the audience-chamber and joined the group of officers awaiting the governor's appearance, "Delaup has handed in his resignation as under-secretary to his excellency."

"Impossible !" cried de Coulanges. "Certainly he had no intention as late as yesterday afternoon of taking such a step."

"Nevertheless, it is true," said Belleisle ; "I have just been informed of it by the marquis himself, who seems much put about."

"Doubtless Monsieur Delaup intends to march with the expedition," observed

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de Valdeterre with an appearance of interest.

“On the contrary,” returned Belleisle, “he remains to” —

“To marry la belle Diane,” interrupted another of the group, in a tone of conviction.

“When do we march?” demanded de Valdeterre turning abruptly to Major Belleisle, who had been placed in command of the forces.

“Not later than the noon of to-morrow,” returned that officer, hastening to meet the governor, who entered at that moment with several members of the council. Delaup also came in with him. He was talking in a low voice to the marquis: a word or two which reached their ears convinced Gailliard and de Valdeterre that he was presenting plausible reasons for his unexpected withdrawal from the governor’s service.

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Toward mid-afternoon, the newly appointed captain of the Company of Bachelors returned to his apartment. He summoned Chapron and informed the old valet of his own forthcoming departure on a campaign of uncertain duration.

"I leave you in charge of my affairs during my absence," he concluded, "and in case of my death" —

"Monsieur will pardon me if I interrupt," said Chapron. "It is not the place of a domestic to interrupt, I know. But it is useless for monsieur to proceed with his instructions."

"What do you mean, rascal?" cried his master, furious.

"It is quite useless for monsieur to proceed with his instructions," protested Chapron obstinately, "since wherever monsieur goes, I go also."

"Blockhead!" cried de Valdeterre impatiently, "you would but be in the way. Besides, you are too old; you would" —

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“Pardon if I interrupt! But I promised madame, the mother of monsieur, that death alone should separate me from her son. Where monsieur goes, I go.”

“Chapron!” cried the young man, his voice shaken with emotion, “thou art a wooden head and an idiot; that jumps at the eyes! But thou art a good soul. Have thy way.” He held out his hand, which Chapron seized and pressed to his withered cheek.

“I go to pack the portmanteau of monsieur,” he said with a sudden return to his ordinary respectful manner.

His master looked after him with an affectionate smile as he passed out.

He set to work to sort over the letters and papers in the accumulated mass in his table drawers; but with a preoccupied air. At length he pushed the pile of stuff aside and leaned back in his chair, admitting to himself frankly that for twenty-four hours he had kept him-

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self feverishly busy in the vain hope of shutting Diane de la Roche out of his thoughts.

“I love her,” he admitted fiercely to himself. “Why should I longer keep up to my own heart the foolish pretense of hating Diane de la Roche? I love her! There is blood between us, and likely to be more when that unreasonable boy comes back — if he ever does. But I love her. And — if she is wholly indifferent to me, why should she have looked at me — as she did look at me, out there by that field of fleurs de lys? Oh, my father, if you could have but foreseen!”

He folded his arms upon the table and dropped his head upon them, shaken with a tempest of conflicting emotions. Suddenly he arose and took from a casket on the mantel a case containing his father's miniature; it was one which the elder de Valdeterre had given his wife only the day preceding the fatal duel. The

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son gazed long and fixedly at the fine open face smiling out at him from within the gold frame, as if asking the dead father what he should do. He turned at length with a sigh, intending to restore the miniature to its receptacle ; but as he closed it the ivory, loosened from the frame, — doubtless by the damp, — fell into his open palm. He uttered a frightened exclamation, followed by another of curiosity, for fitted to the case underneath where the portrait had been lay a folded paper ; he took it out and opened the single thin, discolored sheet, which he saw with a beating heart was covered with writing.

It was a contract of marriage between Henri Louis Nadan, son of Henri Nadan, Vicomte de Valdeterre, and Marguerite his wife, and Diane Barbe, daughter of Valcour Méry de la Roche, chevalier, and Marie Barbe his wife. The contract bore the date of January 4, 1734 ; and

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the signatures of the Vicomte de Valdeterre and the Chevalier de la Roche, with those of two witnesses, whose names were dimly familiar to the reader. He laid the yellowed sheet on the table and seated himself in the chair he had just vacated, for his knees trembled under him. He leaned forward to read the paragraph beneath the formally worded contract :—

“If any difference should arise between us, this shall in no particular affect the fulfillment of the above contract between the said Henri Louis and the said Diane Barbe.

“HENRI NADAN DE VALDETERRE,
VALCOUR MÉRY DE LA ROCHE.”

A contract of marriage between Henri Louis Nadan de Valdeterre and Diane Barbe de la Roche ! Diane, then, at the time of her betrothal to Henri Louis

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Nadan de Valdeterre would have been about two years old, and the said Henri Louis ten ; and the said Henri— He sprang to his feet in an access of delirious joy ; why, the said Henri was none other than himself ; and Diane, beautiful Diane—oh, the thing was past all belief. Yet, his mother's long-forgotten words, meaningless to him at the time, but wistful, sweet, tender, came back to him : “It was ever the wish of your father and Valcour” —

This, beyond a doubt, was the wish of those two cruelly parted friends !

He folded and replaced the paper under the miniature in its hiding-place, fitted the miniature over it, and thrust the case in his breast-pocket.

“Diane ! my Diane !” The words broke, exultant, from his lips. He seized his hat and bounded down the stair like a schoolboy.

XV

ZOZO MOQUER¹

JUST time for one word !” he murmured, throwing himself upon his horse. He rode at a gallop out to the Port St. Jean. The soldiers saluted as he passed the little pentagonal fort ; it seemed to him that there was something pleasantly significant in their greeting : it was in fact evoked partly by the sight of the graceful and handsome figure on the curveting steed, and partly by the knowledge that here was the young captain of the Company of Bachelors.

Leaving the Bayou Road on the left, the rider turned into a rutty way overhung by umbrageous oaks, which led in the direction of the red-roofed house so

¹ Mocking-bird (*oiseau moquer*).

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keenly noted the day before. His eyes sought, along the side-wall as he passed it, the gate which once on a time he had entered with Achille. He saw it, a green patch in the distance. He smiled securely ; even the hot-headed Little Chevalier would not insist on a duel *à l'outrance* with his brother-in-law. All his own anger and impatience had melted away ; he would have liked to take that red-headed boy into his arms ! Diane's brother !

He dismounted at the ponderous wooden gate before the château, and tapped the swinging bell with the hammer which hung beside it. The gate was opened by a negro, who took the visitor's horse and ushered him in.

The hereditary enemy of the House of la Roche passed up the wide, shelled walk — traversed by him once before under a January moon — which led to the house. It was shaded by a double row of opopanax-trees, whose tiny yellow puff-balls of

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blossoms loaded the air with a vanishing perfume. The sweep of lawn to right and left was dotted with clumps of bananas with broad leaves rustling and swaying in the breeze, and yuccas with tall spikes of greenish-white, waxen, bell-like flowers.

At the entrance of the château, Achille, the major-domo, greeted him. "Oui, miché, l' 'tite maitresse dans jardin. Mo courri l'appé," he said eagerly, before de Valdeterre had time to speak; he indicated a small reception room on the right of the hall and walked rapidly away. But de Valdeterre, reckless of propriety, followed upon his heels; he recognized, as he passed it, the room where he had lain listening to the dancing master's discourse the night of the duel, and cursing his own luck! The door was closed, as was also the door directly opposite; but through the latter came the sound of voices, blended in song, and the ghost-

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like tinkle of a harpsichord. He knew the voices ; they were those of the *Sieur Bébé* and the favorite of *Louis the Magnificent*: thin and bodiless as dreams, they united in a madrigal of youth and love. He pictured to himself the ancient dame whose youth seemed to him as remote as that of the vanished gods, sitting at the harpsichord, her *Fontanges* headdress towering toward the ceiling, and the fantastic figure of the *maitre de danse* bending over her.

“ Oh, Love and Youth went forth together,
All in the gay and golden weather,”

they sang, with many comical quips and quirls and quavers. But the chance listener stealing by had no mind to laugh. “ Oh, Youth and Love ; ” he repeated the strain softly under his breath.

Achille, hastening out at a rear door, had darted into a path that wound between thyme-bordered beds in the pota-

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ger ; at an opening in the privet hedge, arched over by a flowering jessamine, he stopped. “ ’Tite maitresse là-bas, miché,” he said with a wave of the hand.

De Valdeterre thanked him with a smile and the offer of a gold-piece, which the negro rejected with dignity but without offense.

The plaisance was wrapped in soft shadow, for the sun had set ; the warm languid perfume of roses pervaded the spot ; the fountain lay dark and still within its encircling ring of wide-leaved caladiums. The white marble Diana looked serenely down upon her white namesake seated on a garden bench at her feet. De Valdeterre’s throat swelled painfully as he came in sight of the graceful figure as motionless — perhaps as cold — as the one above it.

“ Diane ! ” he breathed softly, standing before her, “ I have come to say but one word, and to ask but one word in reply.

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I love you, Diane ; I have loved you from the first moment I saw you ! ”

She remained silent, though she lifted to him her beautiful starry eyes.

“ If you cannot love me in return,” he continued, steadying his voice, “ at least let there be peace between us.”

“ But,” she murmured, and her tone was so low that he had to bend forward to hear her, “ but I love you ! I loved you before ” — she stopped, confused and trembling ; for he had seized her hands and was pressing them passionately to his breast.

The interview was short ; too short for explanation, or review of the past ; or even for him to show to her the betrothal contract signed by Valcour de la Roche and Henri de Valdeterre ; long enough only for a mutual pledge and the betrothal kiss.

Diane did not demur when he arose to go. “ I am the daughter of a soldier,”

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she said proudly. "But you will come again, Henri, before — before you march?" she faltered, breaking down suddenly, and clinging to him with entreating hands.

"To-morrow, at eleven, my beloved. We march at noon. Ah!"

For, as he spoke, the first level rays from the just-arisen moon fell along the shadowy alley-way, throwing into startling relief against a background of foliage the two white Dianas; and a bird in the magnolia-tree over against them broke into a flood of melody, clear, buoyant, soaring, wonderful.

"'T is the zozo moquer," said Diane.

XVI

THE COMPANY OF BACHELORS

THE troops, the next morning, under the command of Major Belleisle were ready to march.

The battalion consisted of six companies of foot : five composed of white men and one of free blacks, with a small band of Colapissa Indians, intended mainly as scouts, headed by a half-breed of proved integrity. There was no artillery, the forced march forbidding the incumbrance of the clumsy wagons.

The Company of Bachelors were already assembling at the rendezvous — the open stretch of ground between the Place d'Armes and the river, when de Valdeterre, after a brief conference with the chief officer, rode out once more,

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spurring his horse to full speed, to the Château de la Roche.

The château gate was closed and locked ; he beat impatiently upon the bell with the hammer. A negro in the house-livery, but unknown to him, answered the summons. "Mademoiselle de la Roche does not receive to-day," he said in good French, barring the way respectfully as the young man attempted to enter. De Valdeterre looked at him with haughty incredulity while he repeated the words ; then, shouldering him aside unceremoniously, he strode swiftly to the house.

He waited upon the step, for the house-door, like the gate, was closed and locked. A second lackey presented himself ; de Valdeterre did not wait for him to speak ; he thrust a visiting-card into his hand and peremptorily bade him take it to his mistress. A second later from the small reception-room on the right of the hall he heard distinctly the voice of

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Diane, raised, he divined, purposely, "Say to Monsieur de Valdeterre," the tones were clear, cold, and incisive, "that Mademoiselle de la Roche is not at home."

He stood dumfounded, waiting for the heavens to fall, while Sieur Bébé within said something in a low voice; he could not catch the words, but they might have been conciliatory or remonstrant. For Diane, again raising her voice, repeated, "Say to Monsieur de Valdeterre that Mademoiselle de la Roche is not at home."

He did not await the messenger.

"Heartless, capricious coquette! was it worth your while to trample under your feet yet another? and that other the man who has already suffered enough at the hands of your accursed breed? Gailliard was right. It is safer to hate you than to love you, Diane! And henceforth and forever I hate you!"

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The battalion marched out of the city by the Gate St. Louis, and up the Tchou-pitoulas Road, amid the acclamations of townspeople who had assembled along the route. At the same time the boats carrying provisions and ammunition, manned by stalwart oarsmen, pushed off from the landing in front of Government House.

The flower of beauty was on the galleries and balconies lining Levee Street, as the flower of chivalry was in the rank and file of the troop. The Company of Bachelors provoked the wildest enthusiasm as it swung sturdily past the Palace where the governor's lady had assembled her friends, the marquise herself sending out a guidon which was at once intrusted by the captain commanding to young de Courcy. Mademoiselle d'Hauterive threw down a double handful of roses, and leaning over the gallery railing, clapped her white hands and called out a Godspeed. De Valdeterre, raising his hat

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in response, saw Diane de la Roche by the side of Madame de Vaudreuil ; her sparkling eyes were bent on the Baron de Marquand, who was fastening in his buttonhole the ribbon she had dropped to his hand.

“So,” growled Gailliard, who was one of the under-officers, in his captain’s ear, “the Baron de Marquand is the latest victim. Let the fond fool wear his ribbon. ’T is the badge of Circe’s band !”

“She must have ridden hard upon my horse’s hoofs — to gloat over my misery,” thought the captain. He lifted his head proudly, kissed one of Alys d’Haute-*rive’s* roses, and tossed it back with a smile to the giver.

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The expedition, making a rapid march, was joined on the morning of the second day out by Achille, the free man of color, who thenceforward served as chief guide, his long service under his master,

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the late Chevalier de la Roche, having made him familiar with the country on both sides of the Mississippi, from the lower coast to the upper limit of the Province. The first two days' march led through plantations and concessions scattered many miles apart along the river ; and past several of the small forts erected and garrisoned during the last administration. On the third day, still keeping within a stone's throw of the river and the fleet, the battalion proceeded with increasing caution through a hushed and solitary wilderness — filled, as the experienced guide knew well, with terrible possibilities. The Indian scouts were thrown out ; but not a hostile rifle or a whizzing arrow disturbed the stillness ; not a skulking redskin on the confines of the lonely solitude, which was here a vast reach of mighty forest-trees, there a stretch of red land with open vistas pilared with lofty pines ; in one place an

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almost impenetrable canebrake ; in another, a rise of wooded hills.

About noon on the fourth day the straggling column came to an abrupt halt ; word ran along the line that the Indian encampment, the object of the expedition, lay but a few miles ahead ; the scouts reported it to contain between five and seven hundred of those Natchez and Chickasaw warriors who for the past several years had kept the frontier in a state of apprehension, and a band of whom had committed the late massacre.

Orders were given for an immediate attack ; the baggage was placed in the care of a reserve ; word was passed to the boats on the river, and the men swung forward at a steady pace.

The temporary village, with its inclosing palisade reinforced by chevaux de frise along the base, lay at the foot of a ridge which rose gently behind it ; a small stream with low banks ran diagonally

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across the natural clearing in front of the town. As his men emerged at a slow trot from the sheltering forest, Major Belleisle marched them across the brook and threw them at once against the encampment. They charged, shouting, across the prairie ; an answering yell came from the hitherto silent village, and hundreds of half-naked warriors swarmed out.

The combat in the open was terrific ; the Indians used their guns with as much skill as the French ; those unprovided with the white man's weapon discharged a murderous hail of arrows. At close quarters the tomahawk came into play, and against this savage tool sword and bayonet were well-nigh useless. It was a *mêlée* so fast and furious that for a time every man, red or white, fought for himself. De Valdeterre, first among the demoralized officers, succeeded in rallying his men ; and placing himself at their head he cheered them on by voice and

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example. The Company of Bachelors, diminishing in numbers with every fresh assault, seemed to be in a dozen places at once ; their captain appeared to bear a charmed life ; conspicuous among a squad of savages who opposed him as the French and their allies were borne backward on the field, was the young chief Chivonah, who had brought to the governor the tidings of the massacre and the impending raid. His tunic, blanket, and leggings had been cast off ; his tall, supple form—nude, except for a breechcloth—glittered with red and black paint ; his long scalplock was feathered and bound with scarlet ; demoniac cries issued from his lips as his sinewy arm rose and fell in deadly rhythm ; the tomahawk in his hand dropped blood.

De Valdeterre in one unwary moment turned his head ; it was at a groan from Chapron, who had fallen, his skull cleft to the neck, at his side ; on the instant

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he felt a sharp pain in his left shoulder, and at the same time a stinging sensation in his right thigh. He swayed forward, fell prone on his face, and the bloody surge swept over him.

But a turn came in the tide ; the French made a desperate stand on the farther edge of the brook ; the Indians, out-matched, at length gave way and drew off sullenly to the village, but dragging their dead and wounded with them.

The French in their turn retreated across the stream and reëntered the forest. Among the dead brought in from the clearing were young de Courcy, with the bloody guidon still grasped in his stiffening fingers, de Coulanges, St. Ange, and Guyot. De Valdeterre, Breaux, de Contre Coeur, and Allain were seriously wounded ; the two companies of blacks and the band of Colapissas had likewise suffered heavy losses. Trenches were dug and the dead hastily buried ; the wounded looked to.

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"Something is brewing yonder," said Major Belleisle after a time, looking out toward the encampment. "I know the red devils of old. Their silence is ominous. I wish we could draw them forth again. I cannot risk another assault."

The sun had set ; the soft gray of approaching twilight brooded over the scene ; the clearing, with its bloody, trampled sod was as tranquil as a deserted field. No sound came from the village, not even the customary howl of the tribesmen over their dead. The French camp, save for the groans of the wounded, maintained an equal silence.

The negro Achille, seated by the unconscious de Valdeterre, and stanching his bleeding wounds, seemed stirred by some inward anxiety ; his lips moved, and a frown furrowed his dark brow. At Major Belleisle's words he looked up, then off toward the village ; then he rose quickly to his feet.

XVII

THE WHITE MARE

A TROOP of horses had come down the wooded slope beyond the village, and deceived by the unruffled repose of the hour, advanced at a swift trot across the clearing. It was led by a graceful mare, spotlessly white, who, with her beautiful head lifted, stopped like one on watch on the farther bank of the brook some fifty yards above where the French were lying.

The negro Achille had already unwound from about his waist the leathern thong which served as a belt ; coiling it in his right hand he flew with the speed of an arrow parted from the string to where the horses stood quietly slaking their thirst in the shallow, rippling water.

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They scattered, snorting, at his approach ; the mare beyond kept her ground one instant too long. She wheeled, but the negro had already cleared the brook at a jump ; he leaped lightly into the air and settled himself easily upon her back. She reared and plunged madly, uttering terrified cries ; he leaned forward, grasping her flowing mane with one hand, and with the other knotted the leather thong about her mouth ; then, pressing his knees against her flanks, he forced her across the clearing. His colossal figure, startlingly black against the snowy whiteness of the wild creature he bestrode, was erect and centaur-like in its repose. The French held their breath as he pressed the frantic animal on, and jerked her to a halt that threw her back upon her haunches, directly under the palisade of the village.

There he lifted his stentorian voice in a shout of defiance : —

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“Come out, dogs of Natchez, skunks of Chickasaws!” he cried in the language common to all the Indian tribes of the South. “Are you women, that you hide in your lodges in terror of the palefaces?”

The silence in the village attested to the superstitious awe in which the White Mare, hitherto untouched by the hand of man, was held by the people who had cherished her as sacred from a colt.

Again the challenger on his rearing steed roared a prolonged menace, or a taunt, or an appeal, — it might have been all three, — for this time no one in the French camp, not even the Colapissas, understood the strange guttural tongue in which it was uttered. Then, whirling his horse, he thundered back to the forest, bending low to the mare’s neck, for a hail of bullets and arrows followed him. He crossed the stream and dropped unhurt to the ground on the hither side.

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The mare, loosened from his hand, tore away unmolested.¹

Before the flying white cloud had regained the ridge, the savages poured shrieking from the encampment, a horde of painted demons. A second time the small plain became for a brief space a bloody pandemonium ; but a second time repulsed by the French who charged out to meet them, the Indians returned to the shelter of their palisades.

Major Belleisle, in consultation with his officers, summed up his losses and calculated the chances of a third and night sortie : he reluctantly gave the order for a retreat as far as the baggage-camp and fresh ammunition.

Again the trenches were opened and the dead hidden as skillfully as possible from the savages ; the wounded were

¹This episode of the negro and the mare is founded upon an incident related by Gayarré in his *History of Louisiana*: Lecture VI.

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placed in improvised litters, and the silent backward march began.

Achille lifted de Valdeterre, still unconscious, in his powerful arms, refusing the proffered aid of Gailliard and others, and stepped easily along with his burden. The moon had not yet arisen ; the men, spent and wearied, stumbled their way through the vast and gloomy forest, the rear guard following with wary feet, and ears and eyes alert.

Something more than a mile from the village the negro turned aside, unnoticed, and plunged into the heavy underbrush that stretched along at the right of the moving column ; half an hour later he came out on the bank of the Mississippi.

He laid the insensible man gently down on the rank dew-wet grass and walked cautiously down the slope of the bank. A woman arose to meet him by the reedy edge of the river.

THE LITTLE CHEVALIER

“La Tempête?” he breathed inquiringly.

“Why have you called me from the Lodge of Death where I was crooning the Song of the Slain for my people?” she asked, in French, in a low, sombre voice; “and why should I come forth to carry a white brave to the Island of the Half-Living?”

“La Tempête!” he repeated, relieved. “I knew when I called you in the name of the Great Chevalier, that you would come.” He had stooped to unwind the rope which attached a canoe to a young willow-tree. “The white brave is here. But he is beyond your skill, La Tempête: he will die. And the daughter of the Great Chevalier will weep.”

“Ah! it is that? Then were he a dog, or a Choctaw, he shall not die. Fetch him.”

The order was imperative. She unloosened the blanket from her shoulders

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and spread it in the bottom of the boat, and stepped in. Achille laid the young captain on the blanket, with his head on her knees ; and seating himself, picked up the paddle. He looked anxiously over his shoulder.

“There is no danger,” said the Indian woman. “The chiefs are assembled in the Council Lodge. My son, the young Chivonah, sits in council with them,” she added proudly.

The canoe, under the skilled paddle of the negro, was skimming athwart the rapid current of the river ; the waves shimmered in the starlight.

“Machengo !” The exclamation burst from the woman’s lips. The negro ceased paddling for a second and looked over at her.

“’Tis a long time,” he said slowly, “since any tongue hath spoken the name the king, my father, gave me in Africa. But thou, La Tempête, hast not forgotten

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it. And thou hast not forgotten the language of my fathers that I taught thee before the Great Chevalier departed to the Land of Spirits. So that when I called to thee over the palisades, for the sake of the Chevalier's daughter, thou knewest." He bent to his task again.

"Machengo, thou art bleeding: thou, too, art wounded."

"What of that? 'Tis but the scratch of an arrow." He shot the canoe as he spoke into a cove of the small densely wooded island that stretched its narrow length along the middle of the river.

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At midnight the allied Natchez and Chickasaws swooped down on the French camp; the fight, the last for many months, was an utter rout for the Indians, who fled to their encampment, gathered up their women and children, and disappeared, after their wonted fashion, into the untrodden fastnesses. They carried

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several captives with them ; among those supposed to have fallen into their hands were the captain of the Company of Bachelors, and the free man of color, Achille.

The battalion, victorious, but sadly thinned by its victory, set out at once on its return march to New Orleans.

XVIII

AT THE URSULINES

THE morning after Henri de Valdeterre and Diane de la Roche plighted, in the moonlighted plaisance, their mutual troth, an early visitor came to the château. This was Delaup, who rode directly from Government House, while his resignation was still sharing public interest with the approaching departure of the troops for the Indian country. If there had been any sign of discomfiture on his face, or in his small enigmatical eyes, he had succeeded in banishing all trace of it before he arose to greet Mademoiselle de la Roche when she entered the boudoir where he awaited her.

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“I ask a thousand pardons, mademoiselle,” he said, bending low over the hand she gave him, “for my early visit, but — ”

A deprecatory murmur reassured him. She had seated herself in a high-backed chair and was looking at him with a divine smile. She had never been so beautiful, so gracious, so yielding! She did not, in truth, even see the under-secretary; her eyes were filled with an inner vision; her ears were strained to catch the hoof-beats of de Valdeterre's horse, although it wanted fully an hour to the appointed time.

“I wished,” Delaup went on easily, “to be the first to communicate to you an important piece of news — important at least to myself, and, I dare hope, mademoiselle, to you. I have resigned the secretaryship.”

“Ah?” said Diane, with perfunctory interest in her voice, but the misleading

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smile still on her lips. "Then you follow Aide-Major Belleisle to the wars."

"No." He bit his lips, disconcerted for an instant ; but he resumed quietly : "No. However much I may desire to march with the troops, there are other duties . . . the governor" — his somewhat mysterious tone intimated a secret understanding with his excellency — "I wished to tell you this myself. Besides, my longing to see you — after yesterday — was so great —"

Diane stared at him. What did the man mean? What had Delaup, or any soul alive, save only Henri de Valdeterre and herself, have to do with yesterday?

"— If I read overmuch in your eyes, there by the field of fleurs-de-lis —" he could not but see that his listener's attention had wandered. Her thoughts, indeed, had traveled swiftly out to that marvelous field of lilies ; she saw herself looking into a pair of dark, reproachful

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eyes; she felt a sudden pang that the blue lily, dropped from her lover's hand, should have been left to wither on the green turf —

“Diane!” a sudden passion shook Delaup's voice, “I love you. I have come to tell you this, and to ask you to be my wife.”

She regarded him in stupefied silence. For once *la belle Diane* was taken un-
awares.

“But—Monsieur Delaup,” she stammered, — “I—I—it is impossible. Nay, do not come nearer. I am indeed honored by your preference, but —”

“Stay,” he interrupted imploringly. “Do not send me away now. If you but knew —”

“Pardon, monsieur,” she interrupted in her turn, with genuine distress in her voice, “I beg you to cease. It is impossible.”

The blood mounted to his forehead.

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“Listen, mademoiselle, I beg of you,” he urged. “I am rich, richer far than you imagine —”

A haughty movement of her head gave a fatal impetus to his speech. “Oh, I am aware, mademoiselle, that this means nothing to you — now. But sooner than you think you will need some one upon whom you may lean for protection, nay, even for food and shelter.”

“What do you mean?” she demanded, amazed.

“I mean,” he returned, looking steadily at her, “that an enemy of your house has sought and obtained from his majesty an order which sweeps out of your possession into his the château; and not the château alone, but your slaves, your plantations — everything belonging to the family of la Roche. I mean that the man who has done you this wrong is about to exercise his infamous but legal right, and —”

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“And who, may I ask,” she broke in frowning, though far from taking in the full significance of his words, “who, may I ask, is this man?”

“The man? The traitor? Yes, mademoiselle. The man is the Vicomte de Valdeterre.”

“It is false!” she flashed, springing to her feet, her bosom heaving, her angry eyes aflame. “It is false! I do not believe it! I would not believe it if a thousand tongues like yours cried it aloud. The Vicomte de Valdeterre is incapable of such treachery.”

“You will nevertheless believe the signature of his majesty, and the Great Seal of France.” He drew from his bosom a folded paper with the seal attached by a ribbon, and held it out to her. She took the paper and glanced over it. It was a duplicate of the order already in de Valdeterre’s possession, but included certain paragraphs not in

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the original. It bore the date February 13, 1752.

“Neither do I believe the signature of his majesty nor the Great Seal of France,” said Diane contemptuously. “Have you said all, Monsieur Delaup?” She moved toward the door, the paper still in her hand.

For answer he followed her and handed her an open letter addressed to the Vicomte de Valdeterre, in the care of Governor the Marquis de Vaudreuil ; it bore the signature of a court official whose name was well known in the Province.

“My dear Henri,” the writer began, “I send you by request of his majesty’s private secretary an order rendering null and void the one issued to you in August of last year, before you sailed from France for Louisiana ; this being rendered expedient by news of the death of the Chevalier de la Roche lately come to court. You will find your privileges somewhat

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curtailed in this matter, but there remains to you a handsome portion, especially as it now transpires that the exiled la Roche knew the secret of some rich mines out there. You will doubtless take possession at once. You will need no urging, since from your late letters I understand — ”

“I understand”—Diane turned the page and read on to the end. “How came you in possession of these papers, monsieur?” she asked, refolding the letter with great deliberation.

Delaup, emboldened by her change of tone, hastened to answer, a trifle triumphantly, “I found means to come at the piece of villainy, — means justified, as I know you will agree, by de Valdeterre’s knavery.”

“Monsieur Delaup,” Diane’s tone had become cutting and scornful, “you have indeed this day unmasked three villains ; the first and greatest yourself, who have

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stolen — yes, monsieur, I repeat the word ! — stolen this private correspondence ; the second, myself, who have stooped to the baseness of reading what was not intended for my eyes ; and lastly, Monsieur de Valdeterre, who at least has the excuse of being my enemy.”

“Mademoiselle ! — ”

“For him,” she continued, regardless of the interruption, “he may exercise his rights when he will. I shall not lift a finger to prevent. For myself, I shall commit the further baseness of keeping these stolen papers. For you, monsieur, go.”

“You will not keep those papers, mademoiselle !” he cried, approaching her, his face swollen with rage.

“Not one step nearer, monsieur !” She laid her hand on the bell-rope. “Go at once, or I call.”

His eyes fell before the steely glitter of hers. He slunk slowly out and away.

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After de Valdeterre had come to the château on his bootless errand of love, and gone again, Diane passed into the room where Madame de Ste. Hermine, seated at the harpsichord, was practicing the "Lover's Madrigal" with *Sieur Bébé*. The storm which had shaken the young châtelaine of La Roche to the soul had left her lovely eyes dimmed and her cheeks pale, but her manner had lost none of its imperious grace.

"*Sieur Bébé*," she declared, when she had made the old henchman fully acquainted with the affair, and had given him the king's order to read — reserving the letter, however, — "I shall not stay another hour in *Monsieur de Valdeterre's* house."

"But, my dear Diane —" he began, clearing his throat for argument.

"Not one word!" she cried, with an impatient stamp of her foot. "I am decided."

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“Madame de Ste. Hermine —” he began again, with an apprehensive look at that unconscious lady, whose yellow fingers still strayed over the yellow keys of the harpsichord.

“You will see that arrangements are made for Madame de Ste. Hermine to be carried in her chair this day to the Convent of the Ursulines,” interrupted Diane.

The *Sieur Bébé* obstinately maintained that the move, if it must be made, should at least be taken in a more seemly fashion, as became the ladies of *la Roche* ; that they should take temporary quarters with those friends in *Rue Royale* with whom they usually passed the night (as on the night of the *fête des rois* at the palace) when they desired to attend a rout or a masquerade ; that they should most certainly wait until later in the day, or until the wearing apparel of madame and mademoiselle could be packed.

All this to no avail. Diane, flying about

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from room to room, stormed like a lovely young Fury, with the gaunt dancing master at her heels essaying coaxing, remonstrance, philosophy, downright abuse. She burst finally into a flood of tears, protesting between sobs that *Sieur Bébé*, like the rest of the world, like the vindictive and bloodthirsty *de Valdeterre* himself, wished to drive her to madness or self-destruction !

“*Mademoiselle*,” said *Bébé* in his high-keyed voice, but with great dignity, “you are unjust.”

“I know it, d-dear *Sieur Bébé* ! Please forg-g-give me.”

“I never thought to see you so very a woman, *mademoiselle*. It is time you recalled the *Little Chevalier*.”

“Oh, the *Little Chevalier* !” cried *Diane* scornfully.

And so it was that *Madame Ame-naide de Ste. Hermine*, who, because the *Grand Monarque* had once upon a time

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admired her in a sedan chair, had ever since refused to take a coach, — was borne before noontide by stalwart chairmen to the Convent of the Ursulines, where she was received with the respect due her position and comfortably bestowed, and where her great-great-niece joined her, after witnessing the departure of the troops for the Indian country from the gallery of the Palace.

Sieur Bébé remained at the château to overlook the slaves of Monsieur de Valdeterre — for so the beautiful Diane designated her faithful blacks.

The Marquis de Vaudreuil had an interview with his ward at the convent, from which he returned to Government House silent and preoccupied ; but governor and ward kept their own counsel ; and in the anxious days which followed the marching of the troops, little was said of the latest, most mysterious caprice of la belle Diane.

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One morning, some six days and a half after the Company of Bachelors and their fellow soldiers stepped forth from the Porte St. Louis, Sieur Béb  rang at the gate bell of the Convent of the Ursulines. The convent, built for the order some twenty years earlier, — the stained glass window over the door bears the date 1734, — stood, and still stands, a venerable but sturdy relic of French colonial days, in Chartres Street, then Cond . Its broad fa ade, with the small pillared porch, looked down then as now on a grassy court; through the wide door glimpses could be had across the large hall of a garden in the rear, laid out in prim squares planted with vegetables and herbs, and bordered with young orange-trees. The high fence in front was broken by a porter's lodge; here on a cypress settle Sieur B    seated himself to await Mademoiselle de la Roche.

She came out of the convent, a picture

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of freshness and bloom in her white morning-gown.

*“Plaisir d’amour ne dure qu’un moment.
Chagrin d’amour dure toute la vie,”*

she sang as she came ; her gay voice in the old chanson blending with the monotonous voices of the nuns chanting in the convent chapel a hymn to the Virgin.

“Good-morning, *Sieur Bébé*,” she cried, entering the lodge. “What news from the troops, — and the Baron de Marquand ?”

“There hath been a fight,” returned the dancing master soberly. “I know not whether the Baron de Marquand be hurt or no. But ’t is said — though the news is yet in the air — that the captain of the Bachelors — ”

“I pray he hath been trussed by an arrow, or that a fortunate bullet hath lodged in his arm,” interrupted Diane gayly.

“ — That the captain of the Company

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of Bachelors," continued *Sieur Bébé*, "hath been killed."

Diane sank upon the bench beside him pale and trembling. "And the baron?" she demanded, her hand pressed to her heart.

"I know not, as I have said. Doubtless — why, God in Heaven! *Achille*!"

He sprang up. It was indeed the gigantic figure of *Achille* which darkened the doorway; he lunged forward as he crossed the threshold, and would have fallen but for *Bébé*, who threw an arm around him, and eased him gently to the floor. The poor fellow's garments were covered with blood from the reopened wound in his breast. His eyes rolled wildly; he gasped painfully for breath.

"*Achille*! my poor *Achille*!" sobbed *Diane*, dropping to her knees and lifting his head to her arm.

"A bandage at once, sister," said *Sieur*

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Bébé to the portress, “and unguents. Stay, I will go myself.”

But the negro caught at his sleeve and fixed entreating eyes upon him. “*La Tempête mo disait —*” he murmured with an effort.

At the name *Sieur Bébé* knelt again, and leaning over placed his ear close to the lips of the dying man. The message, delivered in the familiar patois, was interrupted by unconscious lapses into that strange tongue, with which, sitting on the back of the white mare, he had summoned the Indian woman from the encampment. But it was soon finished, and as the last word left his lips, life struggled to follow.

A tremor shook the great limbs, the glazed eyes sought first the face of the dancing master, whose own eyes were streaming with tears ; then that of *Diane*, pale with anguish : “*li bon ami,*” he whispered to the one, “’*Tite maîtresse !*”

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to the other. Suddenly an ecstatic smile illumined the African features and transformed them into nobility.

“Mo vois le Grand Chevalier!” he cried, making an effort to rise. “Mo venin, maître!” (I see the Great Chevalier! I am coming, master!”)

The giant body fell back lifeless; the great soul had followed that beckoning hand.

XIX

DREAMS

IF what you say is true, *Sieur Bébé*—” the voice, low and musical, trembled with some undefined emotion. But that it lacked a certain note of mockery, it had been strangely familiar.

“Nay, this time, unhappily, it is no question of a swoon from overfasting ; or of a body without a scratch from head to heels. There are, I tell you, five distinct cuts ; the man might as well be a tree hacked by a forester ! Each one of his wounds ought, by all rights, to have been mortal ; and would have been, but for—”

“Aha, and this time, too,” thought *de Valdeterre*, roused from slumber to complete consciousness by the *piccolo-voice* ; “this time I know well enough where I

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am. I shall presently, but not just yet, open my eyes. Over yonder, across the room, a fire is dancing in the fireplace ; the light from the flames plays on the high brass fender and the tall firedogs. Above the mantel a pair of rapiers are crossed beneath the portrait of the Chevalier de la Roche — the Great Chevalier. Behind the headboard of the bed where I am lying, the Little Chevalier, impudent puppy ! is in hiding ; and beside me, with a silver cup in his hand, stands Monsieur Dominique Etienne Betancourt, otherwise the *Sieur Bébé*."

" — But for the skill and the devotion of *La Tempête*," — the speaker had evidently moved away from the bed, for the concluding sentence, spoken after a pause, came from a greater distance.

"The *Sieur Bébé* has stepped to the pot on the hearth for another draught of the elixir," reasoned the young captain. He lifted his heavy eyelids.

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His conjecture was correct : *Sieur Bébé* was approaching, cup in hand. He slipped an arm under his patient's head, and presented the cup to his lips. *De Valdeterre* looked into the kindly, quizzical face ; then his gaze sought the dancing flames in the fireplace, the procession of Greek nymphs winding their way to the white temple, the portrait of the Great Chevalier.

His eyes fell instead upon green masses of pine foliage, waving to and fro majestically against a blue sky ; lower, the straight purple trunks, with background of bay and blossoming dogwood. A cluster of tall ferns with nodding fronds grew at the foot of his couch. He looked at all this questioningly ; then at the tall Indian woman who stood with her back against a pine, her blanket hanging from her shoulders, her arms crossed on her breast — and he remembered.

At the moment the negro *Achille* lifted

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him from the canoe on the night of the Indian fight, consciousness returned to him. He saw the stars overhead, and felt against his face, as he was borne rapidly through the underbrush on the island, the wet, sweet leaves of the bay; he heard the sighing of the night-wind in the tall pines. Achille laid him down upon the deerskin couch, which the woman stalking ahead like a shadow had hastily prepared. The two spoke together in low murmurs, leaving him to the sharp agony which wrenched his body with returning sensibility; then the negro plunged again into the thicket and disappeared.

The woman gave him to drink from a gourd. The draught brought to him, before he sank again into oblivion, a hazy remembrance of the Château de la Roche.

Since that night, as often as he awoke, he found *La Tempête*, the great medicine-

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woman of the Chickasaws, brooding over him with sombre face and deep, anxious eyes. Her name had come to him as if by intuition, though he might have heard it spoken by Achille as he drew back to consciousness. She soothed his impatience as one soothes a sick child, speaking French of singular purity, and with perfect ease. His wounds, which she dressed with the softest and deftest fingers, gave him little pain ; he felt them healing hourly ; he knew at the end of a few days that if he cared he might at least sit up in his fern-girdled bed.

But he did not care ; an immense weariness of life had seized him. His thoughts, which for months had hovered, insistent, puzzled, angry, joyous, outraged, around Diane de la Roche, still hovered around that radiant centre ; but they had become powerless to charm, or to agonize — pale and lifeless wraith of once mighty emotions.



BROODING OVER HIM WITH SOMBRE FACE

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“Holà, *Sieur Bébé*,” he now said, with a momentary thrill of interest. “How came you here?”

“I am here, *monsieur le vicomte*,” returned the dancing master seriously, “for the purpose of studying, in the interest of my two professions, to wit, dancing and medicine, the effect of certain herbs and potions on the human body, when it hath been subjected to the play of sundry of the angry passions at the hands of its fellows; as exemplified in warfare, particularly in savage warfare, in the which arrows and tomahawks are used as well as the more civilized rifle.”

Long before the slowly uttered sentence had come to a period, the captain of the Bachelors had closed his eyes and lay pale and motionless under the speaker's eyes. The *Sieur Bébé* abruptly abandoned his learned discourse, waited a while in silence, and then beckoned

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with his hand to La Tempête. She quitted her place and moved to his side with a stately step.

The Chickasaw princess was at this time about forty years of age. She had been beautiful ; she still retained much of that charm of form and feature which had had its share in giving her the extraordinary ascendancy among her people which she had enjoyed from her girlhood, and which she maintained to the day of her death. She was of a commanding height, slenderly built, and of almost perfect proportions. Her skin, of a warm brown tinged with red, was smooth as ivory, or the petal of the magnolia. Her eyes, which looked out from a profusion of unbound black locks, were dark and piercing, inspiring a feeling of awe ; her high cheekbones gave a look of sternness to an otherwise softly rounded face. Her hands and feet were small and of exquisite slenderness.

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Her dress, unlike that of most Indian women, was without ornament, except for the thread of scarlet, — indication of her high rank, — drawn through the hem of her tunic, and the fancifully embroidered moccasins on her feet.

“La Tempête,” said the *Sieur Bébé*, “the wounds of the young man are almost healed, thanks to thy skill. The poultices of ground-ivy and the baths of copal have wrought a miracle. He should, as I have told thee many times already, according to all human calculation, have died.”

“Said I not to *Machengo* that the young man should not die?” returned the woman in a low, even voice.

De Valdeterre heard. He heard also, or he thought he heard, a light sigh behind the blanket which sheltered the head of his bed from the wind. But he made no sign.

“True,” assented *Bébé*. “Still, I marvel at thy art. It hath but become more

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potent with the passing of years. But as thou seest, La Tempête, the youth thou hast snatched from death and whose wounds are so quickly healed, doth not drink freshness and strength from the elixir, as should follow. Moreover," he laid his large hand lightly on de Valdeterre's forehead and felt his wrist with tentative finger-tips, — "moreover, his fever hath been steadily mounting this hour past."

"I know," replied La Tempête; "it is not the body. Thinkest thou, *Sieur Bébé*, that I see not beyond the wall of flesh that veils the spirit? There is something which gnaws like a wolf at the young chief's heart."

"'T is the *zozo moquer*," said de Valdeterre unexpectedly, opening fever-bright eyes, and staring with incipient delirium in his gaze at the two figures, towering monstrous, grotesque, formidable, above his bed.

DREAMS

“’T is the zozo moquer,” he repeated angrily.

And then he slept, and dreamed strange dreams.

In one of these dreams he seemed to himself to awake, and to lie under the starlit sky which showed in velvety patches between the dark pine-tops, and so lying, to live over the hurried march at the head of his men to the Indian fort, and the bloody fight, with the bullets screaming above the tumultuous yell of the savages ; and Chapron, his old Chapron, tumbling headless to the ground at his feet ; and Achille on the white mare under the palisaded wall ; and the Indian woman bending over him, with her tragic face looking out of long, loose locks of night-black hair ; and Sieur Bébé giving him to drink from a silver cup. As he lay thinking on all this, there burst suddenly upon the night-air a wail — shrill, prolonged, mournful — that now was close

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at hand, and now falling and far away. He trembled (in his dream) on the deer-skin couch ; and a rose-leaf fell on his forehead. . . .

Again after many years he opened his eyes into the soft light of late afternoon ; this he knew (in his dream) by the shadows on a certain purple pine-trunk ; the Little Chevalier, wrapped in his long cloak, his brow shaded by his broad hat, was keeping watch — alone — beside him. The blue eyes were brooding ; the young face was pale, as if the boy had been ill.

“My Little Chevalier !” he cried, “and what do you here in the forest ?”

The Little Chevalier leaned over and laid a cooling hand on his cheek. . . .

Other many years went by, and once more (in his dream) the Little Chevalier sat by his couch — alone ; this time the midnight wind was damp, and the lad drew the bed-covering over him and set the cup of elixir to his lips.

DREAMS

“Little Chevalier, why do you tend me?” he demanded. “I deemed you my enemy.”

“And so I am,” returned the lad, “and therefore I tend you. For look you, Monsieur de Valdeterre, you shall not die until you have visited me once again in my garden.”

“Ah, my Little Chevalier! That is spoken with the honesty of a true man. But, your sister Diane —”

“My sister Diane is a saucy jade.” A frown furrowed the smooth white brow. “She is not worth your thought, monsieur le vicomte.”

“It is the zozo moquer,” whispered the captain mysteriously, drawing the boy’s face close to his own fever-burnt cheek.

XX

THE ISLAND : OYĒ-CHI-CHI-TA

WHEN the captain of the Bachelors, on a fresh May morning, awoke at one and the same time from these curious dreams, and from the fever which for many days had burned in his veins, he found himself alone with the *Sieur Bébé*.

That individual, seated on the ground with his back against a pine-tree, and his long legs stretched out before him, was beating the air with a bony hand, and nodding his bared head in time to the *gavotte* which he hummed between his teeth ; his eyes were closed, his lean face expressed profound satisfaction.

De Valdeterre, keeping a wary look upon him, quickly and furtively lifted a

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fold of the blanket which hung at the head of his bed, and dropped it. "Not even the ghost of a Little Chevalier, this time!" he murmured.

He cleared his throat loudly, and without awaiting a response from the dancing master he sat up; he felt no pain, only a slight giddiness. A sense of exhilaration had succeeded to the dull melancholy which for so long had pervaded his whole being. He made no effort to analyze this change, but uttered a second and deeper "hem," grinning like a mischievous schoolboy. *Sieur Bébé* conscientiously rounded the airy phrase he had reached to a period, and opened his eyes.

"Holà! my dear vicomte," he called cheerfully; "you arrive exactly at the right moment. I was expecting you. *Pardieu!* but you have the rosy air of a page!" He gathered up his legs, got upon his feet, and bowed with great ceremony.

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De Valdeterre also stood up; he essayed to return the salute, but his knees bent under him, and he sank perforce to the couch.

“Not yet, monsieur, for the love of God!” cried the dancing master, dropping his bantering tone and hurrying forward. “Why, man, are you so in love with Oyê-chi-chi-ta that you wish to remain here yet another fortnight?”

“An I were not fasting, Sieur Bébé,” said the captain defiantly, “I could at this moment step a pavane with any page of his majesty’s court. But you said yourself that a man fasting is but the half of a man!”

“True,” returned Bébé, already busied behind the great pine where he had been sitting; “and truer still it is that a man hungry hath not a particular stomach.” He drew near again, a wooden platter in one hand and a cup in the other. “Nevertheless, monsieur will have the good-

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ness to pardon the coarseness of his diet. Also the want of that heat which man in a civilized state deems necessary to the savor of his food."

The platter contained a loaf of bread and a bit of jerked venison; the cup was filled with coffee, strong and palatable, but cold.

The young man ate ravenously, beseeching his companion, almost with tearful eyes, when the platter was swept clean, for more.

"Such a meal as Lucullus might well invite himself to," he declared, when, at a warning wave of the bony hand, he desisted. "Methinks with such food, and such a companion," — the sieur inclined his head courteously, — "I could dwell forever in — how call you the place, *Sieur Bébé*?"

"Oyē-chi-chi-ta, which in the Chickasaw tongue signifies the Island of the Half-Living," replied the sieur. "It is

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the place where, according to their belief, the souls of their dead tarry a while on their way to the Land Beyond. Also those who travel to the very border of that land because of grievous wounds had in battle ; but who may yet by a mighty effort grasp the parting spirit with an outstretched hand and tether it again to the body ; and so return to the wigwam and the warpath. The red man, monsieur, is not afraid of the dead, but he stands in terror of the mysterious Half-Living, who may or may not come back to his lodge. This is why he shuns this island in the Mississippi, and why those upon it are secure from molestation. Nevertheless," he added thoughtfully, "it were not wise to permit smoke to ascend from Oyē-chi-chi-ta. Therefore, monsieur, I bake and brew only in the night-time."

De Valdeterre had listened with profound interest ; he further learned that

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the island was a small one — a narrow strip on the wide sweep of the river, not far below the ill-fated Fort Rosalie, desolated by the Natchez in 1729.

“You may walk at your ease over the island,” continued *Sieur Bébé*, — “for I surmise that even at this moment you are longing to try your legs, — provided you keep well within the encircling thickets. You might otherwise be picked off from the shore by the arrow of some skulking Natchez or Chickasaw spy, notwithstanding his awe of *Oyē-chi-chi-ta*.”

His listener inquired eagerly after his comrades and the result of the expedition.

The campaign, as already recorded, had ended in a midnight *mêlée*, in which the French were victorious ; the Indians had disappeared with several captives into the wilderness ; and Major *Belleisle* had marched his troops back to New Orleans. The captives — among whom

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the captain of the Bachelors was at first supposed to be numbered — had been tortured and put to death ; the chiefs, alarmed by the threat of the governor, had since sent an equal number of their own young men to suffer death in the Place d'Armes by way of indemnification ; and had besought humbly to be allowed to smoke the pipe of peace with the Great White Chief.

“ 'Tis but to gain time for further deviltry,” remarked the sieur in conclusion. “ I marvel that his excellency consents to parley with the dogs.”

“ Strange,” commented de Valdeterre, musing on his own miraculous escape from torture and death ; “ strange that the negro Achille should have so saved me at the expense of his own life, poor fellow ! But I remember that he had shown a sort of devotion to me of late. Doubtless I had for the gigantic black one of those inexplicable attractions

THE ISLAND: OYĒ-CHI-CHI-TA

which one human being sometimes has for another."

Sieur Bébé smiled wisely behind his palm, but said nothing.

"But La Tempête?" demanded the young man; "what interest had La Tempête in a stranger like myself?"

"La Tempête," replied Bébé, "came to you for the sake of Achille, who befriended her in many ways in the days of the Great Chevalier. Besides, you were not the only man brought to Oyē-chi-chi-ta after those bloody fights."

"Then," cried the captain eagerly, "there are others of the Half-Living on the island?"

"There was another."

"Not the Little Chevalier," de Valde terre said to himself with conviction. "That was a dream."

Seeing that Bébé said no more, he proceeded in his catechism. "And you, Monsieur de Betancourt? It could not have

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been for me that you came, but for — that other?”

“Monsieur le Vicomte, La Tempête, whom in the time of the Great Chevalier I knew well, hath long been aware of my thirst for knowledge concerning those herbs and potions which affect the human body, especially when it hath been subjected to certain usage in warfare — savage warfare in particular, in the which arrows and tomahawks share with the more civilized rifle and bayonet in the destruction of flesh and tissue. Now, as I have observed on a former occasion, monsieur, there is an intimate connection, little understood, nevertheless, between the science of medicine, which includes the art of surgery, and the science of dancing, which includes the art of manners. To both of these a knowledge of the complicated human frame is indispensable. Therefore, as I have said, the great medicine-woman of the Chick-

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asaws, — who hath gone back to her people, — acquainted with my desire to advance myself in all that tends to enhance the value of my two professions, dispatched the negro Achille for me, that I might in person study your wounds, which, believe me, Monsieur de Valde terre, were of a nature most remarkable.”

The speaker drew a long breath and started afresh, pressing the finger-tips of his two hands together to emphasize his words.

“I have added largely to my knowledge of herbs and potions, monsieur. For example, to wit: the balsam of the copal-tree hath a virtue past belief for the healing of dangerous wounds ; as also hath the green leaves of the China radix ; and the root known as the choctaw. For the pains which torment the head, the pounded leaves of the ground-ivy; for the fevers which set the blood aboil, an infusion of the *plat de bois*.”

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Mounted thus on his favorite hobby the good soul galloped gayly away. De Valdeterre ceased to listen, though his eyes were fixed with a look of profound attention on the speaker.

“And the Little Chevalier? Was *he* here for me, or for — the other?”

The words did not pass his lips, though he was fain to set his teeth together to keep them from leaping forth. Neither did he then or after ask news of Mademoiselle de la Roche. Something undefined but patent in the manner of his companion forbade this, even had he himself wished to speak of that false and cruel enchantress, as most assuredly he did not!

He walked to and fro in the leafy covert where he had lain for more than three weeks, leaning at first on the arm of the *Sieur Bébé*; but within a day or two, gaining strength from moment to moment, he explored the whole of *Oyē-chi-*

THE ISLAND: OYĒ-CHI-CHI-TA

chi-ta except the extreme upper end, which was cut off from the main body of the island by a deep dry gully. The tall pines, which grew in scattered groups over the high sandy strip of land, were surrounded and interspersed by an extraordinary number and variety of trees and shrubs: ash, magnolia, oak, sweet-gum, opoponax, china, bay, yupon, candleberry, sassafras, and many others, unknown and unnamed. Ferns, heart-leaves, and wood mosses spread with the lush grass their green carpetry on the ground; a profusion of wild flowers brightened the dark recesses of the thickets; birds of bright plumage and insects on glittering wings gave a touch of life to the small paradise set between two arms of the mighty river; otherwise, except for the sigh of the wind in the pines, strangely still. The far-off shores on either side seemed deserted, from the purple-misted mornings when they slept

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like dream-shores under the eastern and western horizons, to the golden evenings when they melted into the soft clouds above them.

For a brief space de Valdeterre thought in his inmost soul that he would be content to dwell, as he had jestingly said, forever in Oyē-chi-chi-ta, hearing nothing, knowing nothing of the world — or of Diane.

But as the days drew on, and full vigor came rioting back through his veins, with it came a quickening desire for change — activity, association, strife, if need be. *Sieur Bébé* phlegmatically prepared by night their food, from the stores in the *cache* behind the great pine ; by day he treated his fellow sojourner, or prisoner, to long disquisitions, which, it must be confessed, fell on more and more unheeding ears. The greatest good fellowship prevailed between the two isolated men. On de Valdeterre's part

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the feeling went indeed far beyond good fellowship, or even gratitude ; he admitted to himself an almost absurd liking for the whimsical, homely, kindly creature shut up with him in Oyē-chi-chi-ta. Nevertheless he fretted.

“Not yet, mon capitaine,” was the invariable reply of Monsieur Bébé to his daily question, “When do we — when may I — leave the island ?”

And when he asked, “Why do we — why must I lie here like a thing truly but half alive, when I have the strength of an ox, and the desire of a man ?” the sieur simply bade him await in patience tokens from La Tempête that the river was not beset with spies.

One day he passed over the bramble-hung gully at the upper end of the island and entered the thicket of yupon and bay set like a screen on the farther side ; a step or two beyond this brought him to an open space encircled by enormous

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pine-trees, and swarded with grass vividly emerald in the mellow afternoon sunshine. He strode forward, singing very softly the old chanson which he had learned from the dancing master : —

*“ Plaisir d’amour ne dure qu’un moment,
Chagrin d’amour dure toute la vie.”*

He stopped amazed.

In the centre of the miniature prairie were two graves, set east and west, with hewn stakes at the head and foot. One was old, the grass-grown mound having that crumbled and sunken appearance which comes to a grave with the lapse of months ; the other was new, the freshly heaped-up earth, soft and loose, was strewn with withered wild flowers ; these lay also on the older grave.

De Valdeterre stood looking wonderingly down on these mysterious evidences of death — and life ! At a slight touch on his shoulder, he turned.

“ Here,” said Sieur Bébé, — for the

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newcomer was he, — indicating the older grave, “here the Chevalier de la Roche is buried.”

De Valdeterre uttered an involuntary ejaculation. The Chevalier de la Roche ! His father’s friend ! His father’s slayer ! The father of the Little Chevalier ! The father of — Diane ! The Great Chevalier !

He removed his hat and bowed his head reverently.

“And here,” continued *Sieur Bébé* in a tone of deep melancholy, — “here sleeps the young chief, *Chivonah*.”

“*Chivonah* !” echoed the captain, trembling with an emotion he could not define.

“He was wounded in the midnight fight which followed that in which you yourself were laid low, monsieur — perhaps by his tomahawk ; God knows. He was brought hither a few hours after you ; and the great medicine-woman of the Chickasaws, who tended you, tended

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him also. But for him her skill was naught; the brave young spirit went forth from Oyē-chi-chi-ta to the Land of Beyond. La Tempête sang the death-song, one midnight, over her son — ”

A sob arose unbidden into de Valdeterre's throat. That death-song! That mother-song! He had heard it, wild and weirdly mournful, riding the still midnight silence!

“I helped her bury him by the side of his father, the Great Chevalier; and La Tempête departed to her own people,” concluded Bébé with a catch in his voice.

The two men walked away in silence. De Valdeterre, glancing furtively at his companion, saw that his eyes had a far-away look, and that the furrows in the long face were wet with unchecked tears. The thoughts of the sieur had indeed traveled backward; he was once more in the forest with the Great Chevalier

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and Achille, the faithful slave, and the fawn-like girl, Olala, who stole out from the wigwam of her father to follow the white chief whither he would ; . . . and then, Olala and her soft-eyed babe, Chivonah ; . . . again, the Great Chevalier in a hostile wilderness, and himself, and Achille, and the girl Olala, become the woman La Tempête, and Chivonah, the supple, leaping boy ; . . . and yet again the Great Chevalier and La Tempête, the medicine-woman, and the young chief Chivonah, with his wild heart divided for and against the white chief, his father. The ceaseless combats, the weary marches, the murderous assaults, savage yells, blood, torture, treachery — all these had faded from his mind ; there stood out against a background of wood and brake only the figures of the Great Chevalier, and Olala, the fawn-like girl, and Chivonah, the young chief ; and Machengo, called Achille, the son of a king !

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“Mo venin aussi, maître,” he murmured, as if he, too, saw a beckoning hand.

.
At sunset the Sieur Bébé received by the hands of an Indian lad the token of La Tempête in assurance that the passage to the city could be made in safety ; and before midnight he stepped with de Valdeterre into a pirogue and paddled noiselessly and swiftly out from a sheltered cove of Oyē-chi-chi-ta to the mid current of the great downward-sweeping river.

XXI

LE VEAU QUI TÊTE

IT was little more than a month since he had marched with the Company of Bachelors through the Porte St. Louis and up the Tchoupitoulas Road, yet it seemed to de Valdeterre, when he stepped from the pirogue upon the levee over against the Place d'Armes, that he had been away for years. The familiar scene in the early morning light — the flotilla of barges, sloops, canoes, and pirogues dancing on the river, or moored to the shore ; the brigs and brigantines lying at ease with their high poops abreast of the levee ; the throng of voyageurs, Indians, sailors, habitans, 'Méricains, chaffing each other in a multitude of tongues — all these once well-known sights and

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sounds had become strange to his eyes and ears. He looked about with half-dazed senses, as he followed *Sieur Bébé* along the levee and across the willow-fringed neutral ground to the square. Hard upon the open gate of the square the dancing master stopped abruptly and faced his late comrade in exile.

“*Monsieur le Vicomte* will have the goodness to understand,” he began in a stiff and formal tone, “that from this moment he becomes once more my enemy, since he is enemy to the House of La Roche, which I have the honor to serve. *Monsieur* will, however, do me the favor to remember that, robust as he now is, it behooves him to be careful until the wound which remains open shall be entirely healed. I have the honor to salute the *Vicomte de Valdeterre*, and to bid him adieu.” He did salute after the most stately fashion, though there were undoubtedly tears in his honest eyes ;

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and rejecting the vicomte's proffered hand, he stalked rapidly away, turning by the Church St. Louis into Rue Condé.

De Valdeterre smiled as he pursued his own way, but there was pain at the root of his smile. "Why," he asked himself — "why did I hurry so foolishly away from Oyē-chi-chi-ta? There, at least, I had a friend. Now" — a deep sigh ended the reflection.

He met as he crossed the Place several men he knew slightly — it was too early for many of the noblesse to be abroad. They greeted him as one unexpectedly returned from the dead.

At the entrance of The Sucking Calf, he came upon Gailliard, who embraced him with lively expressions of surprise and genuine tears of joy; he dragged his new-found friend away from the volatile delight of Jean Marie, and the silent, motherly rapture of Mère Jacqueline,

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into that upper chamber where they two had so often sat at meals together.

“Sit down, Henri, sit down, my fine resurrected corpse of a captain, and tell me —”

“I will talk only to the tune of a knife and fork,” interrupted de Valdeterre, laughing. “It is more weeks than I can count, Gailliard, since I have eaten a civilized meal; though, God forgive me for complaining!” He crossed himself piously.

“Raguet!” shouted Gailliard, running to the door. “Breakfast, Raguet, immediately! Where the devil is that devil of a Jean Marie?”

But Jean Marie had waited for no charge; they presently seated themselves before a table which offered an almost ludicrous contrast to the *Sieur Bébé’s* wooden platters and hunting-knives, jerked venison and cold coffee.

“After all, my appetite was keener in

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Oyē-chi-chi-ta," thought de Valdeterre, suddenly indifferent to Mère Jacqueline's cuisine.

Gailliard, it appeared, had not been without hope of his comrade in all these weeks ; faint rumors had reached him, — he hardly knew whence or from whom — which had in a measure reassured him as to the captain's safety. But, mon Dieu ! the waiting had been long and anxious.

He listened open-mouthed to the story of Henri's timely abduction by the free man of color, Achille ; and of his fight for life in the Island of the Half-Living ; of the marvelous healing touch of the medicine-woman of the Chickasaws, and of the skill and gentleness of Sieur Bébé — the speaker told all that had befallen him, except his absurd vision of the Little Chevalier.

"Wonderful !" commented Gailliard when he had finished. "As for the Sieur Bébé, he shall be carried on the shoulders

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of his old pupils to Government House, and receive a medal of honor from the marquis himself."

"And now, Gailliard," resumed the vicomte, "the news! the news! You do not seem to realize, my dear fellow, that I have been out of the world — one of the Half-Living — for the matter of a century or so!"

"Take a long breath, Henri," returned the royal engineer, "for here is a coil of news that will make your head swim, I promise you. First and foremost, the Marquis de Vaudreuil hath been promoted, or reduced, according as the matter is viewed from one or the other face, to the governor-generalship of Canada. His successor, as we are told, is de Kelerec."

"Ah!" said the vicomte. "It had been softly whispered about before I left that my kinswoman, the Marquise de Vaudreuil, hath for this long time had

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a hankering toward the older glories of Quebec.”

“Well, ’t is settled. Many of the governor’s officers go with him.”

“The late under-secretary, for example?” inquired de Valdeterre, with uplifted eyebrows.

“Oh!—to be sure, you cannot have heard! Delaup is disgraced. According to the royal statute regarding the opening of letters and the breaking of seals, he hath been openly proclaimed, fined one hundred livres, and forever debarred from holding any office under the crown. Had he been a habitan, instead of a nobleman, he had worn the *carcan*.”¹

“But,” cried de Valdeterre, astonished, “how did the knowledge of his crime come to the governor’s ears?”

“Not by me, Henri, though I swear to you, I longed to cry him aloud, the treacherous viper! That morning when he came

¹ An iron collar.

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palavering into the council-room with the marquis, you remember? The man was unmasked to his excellency after we marched, by some one less scrupulous, evidently, than yourself."

"But how—how?"

"I know not the exact details. But at least I know that the thing was tracked by means of certain documents addressed to yourself—"

"To me!"

"To the Vicomte de Valdeterre, yes. These were: a royal order, a duplicate, as I understand, of one already in your possession, authorizing you to take possession of all properties acquired in Louisiana by the late Chevalier de la Roche—"

De Valdeterre sprang to his feet, wholly unable to contain himself, while he listened to all Gailliard could tell him of the affair.

"I know not neither how nor when

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these papers came into the hands of the beautiful Diane," continued Gailliard, "but as a consequence, Delaup, as I have said, is disgraced. He hath disappeared, Heaven send it be forever! and Made-moiselle de la Roche hath abandoned the château and all its belongings, including the negro slaves there, and taken refuge, with the favorite of Louis the Fourteenth, in the Convent of the Ursulines."

"Good God!" ejaculated de Valdeterre; "how she must hate me!"

"Yes," assented Gailliard innocently. "It is a lucky thing for you, Henri, that you also hate her! She declares, I am told, that her House shall never touch a sou of her father's fortune, which is now yours, should she and all her people starve. However," he added, as de Valdeterre opened his lips angrily to speak, "she will but profit in the end by the stir made about the affair de Valdeterre *vs.* de la Roche. For the marquis,

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writing some months ago to beseech the king for the return of Madame de Ste. Hermine to France, spake in so glowing terms, it seems, of the Great Chevalier's daughter, that his majesty hath not only recalled Madame de Ste. Hermine to France, but sends graciously for mademoiselle. 'T is said that he hath declared his royal intention of bestowing her hand in marriage upon one of his favorite courtiers."

"And the Little Chevalier, her brother?" demanded de Valdeterre after a pause.

"The Little Chevalier goes with her," returned Gailliard, looking fixedly at him.

"I shall not myself touch a sou of the la Roche fortune," declared de Valdeterre emphatically, and with heightened color, — "not a sou." He walked back and forth with angry strides.

"My dear fellow," Gailliard remonstrated, "if Mademoiselle de la Roche

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refuses to retain the plantations, houses, slaves, and jewels de la Roche, and you decline to lay a hand upon them, there will be a fat plum to fall into Madame de Pompadour's ever-open mouth, that is all ! I am sure, by the way, that our royal master had no idea of the extent of these possessions when he so generously bestowed them upon you ! ”

De Valdeterre was not listening. He had paused in his walk and stood lost in bitter reflections. Rousing himself with a shake of the shoulders, he repeated : “ No, not a sou, Gailliard. Let the plum fall where it will. For myself, I shall follow the governor to Canada. And you ? ”

“ Oh, I ? ” Gailliard blushed like a schoolboy, and fidgeted in his chair. “ No, I shall stay. Perhaps under the new governor I may yet have a chance of building my canals. Besides,” he added boldly, “ I am going to wed Mademoiselle Alys d’Hauterive.”

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De Valdeterre bounded to his side and seized his hand. "My dear Gailliard, I wish you joy. Mademoiselle d'Hauterive is the most charming young woman in the Province!" he cried heartily.

"And to think," mused Gailliard, shaking his head, "that I once imagined myself enamoured of la belle Diane — capricious, haughty, cruel, implacable Diane! You are lucky, Henri, I repeat it, that you are the enemy and not one of the lovers of Mademoiselle de la Roche!"

XXII

THE PLAISANCE

DE VALDETERRE crossed the courtyard well-nigh roofed over by the giant grapevine, now a spreading glory of green, and ascended the stair. On the threshold of his door he paused, struck painfully by the abandoned and desolate air of the once well-ordered place. "My poor Chapron," he murmured, the tears starting to his eyes, "my poor old Chapron ! Faithfully indeed hast thou kept thy vow, made to thy mistress, my mother — more faithfully than thy master has kept his, sworn to the dead !"

He laid his hat on the dusty table, but started back ; in the dim noon-light filtering in through the closed shutters, he

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perceived the white square of a folded paper on a pile of books. He picked it up, recognizing its source even before he had touched it; underneath it lay a large key.

“From the Little Chevalier,” he breathed, his heart beating with quickened throb. He broke the seal. “To the Vicomte de Valdeterre.” The small, firm handwriting filled but a small part of the large sheet.

To the Vicomte de Valdeterre :—

MY DEAR VICOMTE, — The famous garden which was mine is now yours. I send you the key of the gate in the wall, and I trust that you will allow me once more to play the host in that garden, and to entertain you *à l'outrance* — according to our agreement. Our meeting shall take place, if it please you, at five and a half of the clock, this afternoon, the 7th of June. Until that hour, I remain, my dear

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vicomte, impatient, and with profound respect,

Yours sincerely,

VALCOUR DE LA ROCHE.

“Insensate madcap of a boy!” cried de Valdeterre angrily; “as if — But I will not fight with any de la Roche alive. I am weary of the feud. Let him call me coward if he will. I shall leave my sword behind me. If the saucy varlet run me through the lungs, why then, so much the better, perhaps.

“Pardon, my father!” He unlocked a cabinet and took out the miniature. “Pardon, Nadan de Valdeterre!” He looked long and earnestly at the bright face. “In Paradise, where thou art — and he! thou hast long ago forgiven the friend of thy youth. Pardon me, if I also forgive!”

He closed the case and thrust it into his bosom.

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He closed the gate in the wall and locked it behind him. Within the great inclosure he stood a moment, as once before, and looked about him. Nothing had changed, save that the foliage on the wide-limbed trees was denser and had taken on a more vivid green. Through downward-sweeping branches he could see in the distance the red roofs, gables, and dormer-windows of the château. A mass of greenery hid the quaint clinging balconies, and the wide galleries. The kitchen-garden with its graceful hedges, the grove of orange-trees, the banana-walk—these he surveyed with half-seeing eyes. Finally, he turned into the path by the ditch, which was now criss-crossed with blackberry and dewberry vines, and bordered with tall flowering weeds.

The day was waning, but the warm sunlight shimmered mist-like over the plaisance; a westerling breeze brought to

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his nostrils, as he walked on, the familiar scent of roses and jessamines, and the pungent odor of the yucca-bells. He shut his inner and outer senses to the sweet and bitter memories which assailed him, and hurried on, between fantastic shapes of arbor vitæ and pettisphorum, past the huntress gleaming white on her pedestal, past the mirror-like pool, over which hovered a cloud of yellow butterflies, on by the mildewed sun-dial. When he stepped out upon the open sward, he stopped and stood, motionless, waiting, waiting—it seemed an eternity!—for Valcour de la Roche.

Just as before, the cloaked and plumed figure of the Little Chevalier swaggered out of the turreted summer-house, and moved swiftly toward him over the rank grass. He removed his hat as the lad paused before him, and bent low his bared head.

“Monsieur le Vicomte de Valdeterre”

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— the full, rich, well-remembered voice seemed a trifle unsteady. “Monsieur le Vicomte de Valdeterre,” repeated the Little Chevalier, his tone becoming bolder, “will you do me the honor to draw your sword?”

De Valdeterre remained silent, with downcast eyes and compressed lips.

“What, monsieur! have you forgotten the problem that waits to be solved? or, are you afraid of the result?”

The mocking voice stung the listener almost beyond endurance. But with head still bowed, he replied calmly: —

“Monsieur le Chevalier de la Roche, I refuse to cross swords with you. Think of me what you will.”

“Then,” cried the Little Chevalier, his words leaping sharply into the tranquil air — “then make your *devoirs* to God — and to your Lady —”

The defiance ended curiously in a sob. De Valdeterre trembled from head to

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foot, hearing it. He lifted his eyes slowly. The long cloak, off-cast, lay on the ground ; the plumed hat and the rapier beside it. Diane, in her soft white clinging gown, the sunlight tangled in the strands of the red-gold hair, her eyes shining with unshed tears — Diane stood confessed before him ; she held out beseeching hands.

“Diane !” he stammered, recoiling with amazement and alarm ; then, the truth dawning slowly upon him, “Diane !” he cried again rapturously, clasping her to his breast.

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“How could you have been so stupidly blind, Monsieur de Valdeterre ?” demanded Mademoiselle de la Roche, seated beside him once more on the bench at the feet of the marble Diana. “Never a woman in the whole world, no, not even that dullest of women, Alys d’Haute-
rive, could have been so deceived !”

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Love, he reminded her, was always blind.

But not to his own, she smiled.

Her brother, she told him, Valcour Méry de la Roche, three years her senior, had died soon after their arrival in Louisiana. His name had been added to her own by their stricken father, who from that moment had with his own hand trained her in all those exercises — hunting, fencing, shooting, riding, swimming, in which he himself so excelled. Except in his Indian campaigns, she had companioned him as the other Valcour would have done had he lived. And so, to the Great Chevalier's intimates, and particularly to the Marquis de Vaudreuil, his fast friend, his daughter had come to be known as the Little Chevalier.

“And much ado I had,” she laughed, nestling to her lover's side, “to keep Gailliard and the others from betraying me by addressing me by that sobriquet !

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It took an official order from the governor, though neither he nor they knew my reasons therefor, to send the Little Chevalier into exile, and relegate his name even to oblivion."

"Blessed Little Chevalier!" cried de Valdeterre.

"Do you know I am half jealous of him!" pouted Diane. "For up yonder in Oyē-chi-chi-ta, when you had scourged me, Diane, out of your heart—nay, monsieur, you said it yourself in your delirium!—you spoke tenderly of the Little Chevalier."

"Blessed Little Chevalier!" repeated Henri, kissing the small white hands he held.

"You told me, Henri, here in this very garden of—yours—that you loved me the first time that ever your eyes fell upon me, there by the corner of the Church St. Louis, the night of the Fête des Rois. But I—I loved you before

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that. Ah, how handsome you were that day, Henri, with your sword in your hand, and your head so proudly erect ! And oh, how terrified I was when I thought I had killed you ! and *Sieur Bébé* and *Achille* came running at my cries, and carried you into the *château* and laid you on my father's bed."

"Dear Little Chevalier !" He waited a moment to get the better of the swelling in his throat. "So ! My dream was true, *Diane*. You did come to me in *Oyē-chi-chi-ta* ! You did dress my wounds, and lay your soft cool hand on my forehead !"

Yes. She had set out at once with *Sieur Bébé* — in spite of *Sieur Bébé*, in spite of *Madame de Ste. Hermine*, in spite of the Mother Superior ; her departure unknown to any one else — for the Island of the Half-Living, upon hearing the news brought by *Achille*, poor *Achille* ! It was she indeed and none other who

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had sent the negro after the troops, charging him to watch over the captain of the Bachelors. •

“Even after you had — ”

“Even after I had behaved so outrageously to you? Yes, Henri. Strange, was it not,” she added musingly, “that even before I knew it myself, my poor major-domo divined that I loved you?”

So, that was why! De Valdeterre blushed at his own past conceit, and at *Sieur Bébé’s* indulgence of it.

“And you came back to the city?” he asked.

“In the care of *La Tempête* herself when you were declared out of danger.”

After another contented pause — “Then you knew me — of course you knew me! — that night at the Palace,” he exclaimed suddenly. “How could you — ”

“Nay, but it was not all acting, Henri!”

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she interrupted eagerly. "I thought, I hoped that — that you would have forgiven — everything after, after —" her eyes swam with tears; he kissed them away.

"After I had looked once into your lovely eyes? God forgive me for the brute I was. But, listen!" he cried, pouring out all the story of the pain and humiliation of that unforgotten night.

"But, Diane," he continued, "you? When Delaup came to you with that wretched order," — for she had made him acquainted with the under-secretary's trickery, — "why could you not trust me — so far, at least, as to give me an opportunity to vindicate myself?"

"It was not the order of his majesty," confessed Diane, dropping her eyelids and coloring violently.

"Then, what was it?" he insisted.

For reply, she took from the bosom of her gown the royal order; and then the

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letter purloined by Delaup, addressed to the Vicomte de Valdeterre, at New Orleans, in the care of the governor. She spread the letter out upon her knee, and traced each line with a white forefinger for him to read.

“My dear Henri: I send you by request of his majesty’s private secretary” — de Valdeterre followed the sense with lukewarm interest, his gaze fascinated by the small, exquisitely shaped finger which moved back and forth across the page. “Since from your late letters I understand” — she turned the page — “that you are on the point of asking in marriage the hand of Mademoiselle Alys d’Hauterive, of whom, indeed, you seem much enamoured —”

“This was the reason, Monsieur de Valdeterre!” cried Diane, crumpling the letter in her hand and flashing upon him a fiery glance. “What did I care for his majesty’s order!” She threw up her

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head superbly. "Take the Great Chevalier's property, monsieur, and welcome, all of it!" She was whipping herself into a fine fury. "But this letter — you will explain at once, monsieur, the meaning of this letter!"

"Diane!" Explanation was rendered unnecessary by the tender reproach in his voice. "Besides," he said, "Mademoiselle d'Hauterive is going to marry Gailliard. By the way," he added energetically, "Gailliard tells me that you are going to France with Madame de Ste. Hermine."

She nodded.

"And that the king will bestow the hand of la belle Diane upon one of his own favorites."

"True," she returned demurely. "I have signified my entire acquiescence in his majesty's plans —"

"Diane!"

"— Since the said favorite is none

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other than Henri Louis Nadan, Vicomte de Valdeterre."

• • • • •
"Henri," Diane said presently, "I have one more confession to make. It is a terrible one. But I make it on the part of the Little Chevalier, for whose crime I demand absolution."

"Speak on, my Little Chevalier."

"Henri, I — no, I mean Valcour de la Roche kissed you on the forehead when you were lying unconscious on his father's bed at the château, after your duel with him."

"Ohé, mon Petit Chevalier ! Let us fight a duel every day !"

"And also several times at Oyē-chi-chi-ta."

"Monsieur le Chevalier de la Roche, I will hang a tomahawk by way of thanks in the shrine of St. Louis, my patron saint, as soon as we reach Paris."

The zozo moquer had begun to sing.

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“Diane,” remarked de Valdeterre, “we will be married at once. When a man has been betrothed for more than eighteen years, it is unfair to ask him to wait longer.”

She looked at him in astonishment. In his turn he smoothed a written page upon his knee and traced with his fingers for her to read the faded lines of the contract of betrothal between Henri de Valdeterre and Diane de la Roche.

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The marriage was celebrated a few weeks later in the Church St. Louis which faces the Place d'Armes. It was a great event; the extraordinary beauty of the bride, the fine and manly bearing of the handsome bridegroom, their strange story with its romantic ending, and the unusual favors bestowed by the governor in the king's name upon the young couple — all combined to enhance interest in the affair. A splendid reception at

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the Palace followed the religious ceremony, where the Sieur Bébé in all the glory of lace and ribbon directed the *contre-danse* composed by him for the occasion ; and the marquis drank a toast to Monsieur and Madame de Valdeterre ; and Gailliard in an immortal speech proposed the health of the Little Chevalier.

Monsieur and Madame de Valdeterre remained a few months only in the Province ; but during these months they drew about them in the Château de la Roche all that was gayest and most gallant in the town by the river.

In Paris, whither they went when the great marquis quitted forever his beloved Little Versailles for his new post of duty, they became at once a part of the brilliant life of that joyous capital ; Madame de Valdeterre continuing to the day of her death to be known as la belle Diane.

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The *Sieur Béb * wept when his adored mistress went away. But he could not bring himself to leave the land which enshrined the dust of the Great Chevalier. He fell in a skirmish with the Chickasaws a few months after Diane's departure, fighting gallantly, and pierced by many wounds.¹ Some unknown person, *La Temp te* herself probably, conveyed his body to *Oy -chi-chi-ta*, and laid it to rest beside the Great Chevalier and *Chivonah*, the young chief of the Chickasaws.

No trace of the *Ch teau de la Roche* remains in the town by the river ; the street called Good Children (*Rue des Bons Enfants*) runs across the place where the red-roofed house once stood ; and near the spot where the plaisance of the beautiful *Diane de la Roche* lay bathed in

¹ *Sieur B b *, the eccentric military dancing master of the Province, was in reality killed in an encounter with the Indians in 1748.

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sunshine, rises the quaint old Church of St. Augustine. The crêpe myrtles and the sweet olives which blossom thereabout may perhaps be far-away descendants of those that made sweet the air for the young lovers who listened to the song of the zozo moquer.

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